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PREDICTING WORKPLACE RELATIONAL DYNAMICS USING AN AFFECTIVE MODEL OF RELATIONSHIPS

ABSTRACT

Integrating insights from the organizational social networks and workplace affect literatures, the authors propose a dynamic model of relationships, focusing on the affect experienced within dyadic work relationships to predict their trajectory over time: either improving, declining, or static. The feelings each partner typically experiences within an ongoing relationship (*trait relational affect*) can be distinguished according to their hedonic tone and activation level, and the combination of both dyadic partners' trait relational affect is predictive of the relationship trajectory. Furthermore, the emotions each partner experiences during specific interactional episodes (*state relational affect*) can alter and disrupt this relationship trajectory, either temporarily or permanently, to the extent that they diverge from the trait relational affect that is typically experienced. A given relationship trajectory over time leads to the development of different types of informal work ties (strong, negative, or weak), which are associated with a wealth of organizational consequences including effort, motivation, performance, and innovation. The model addresses criticisms that organizational social network research neglects the role of affect and views networks as static entities. The model further provides affect researchers with a novel framework that considers affect as a relational rather than individual phenomenon.

Keywords: Emotions, Organizational Social Networks, Relational Affect, Relational Dynamics, Workplace Relationships

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"People may not remember exactly what you did, or what you said, but they will always remember how you made them feel."- Maya Angelou

Organizations are increasingly understood as a nexus of social relationships (Freeman, 2004; Granovetter, 1985; Kilduff & Brass, 2010; Wellman & Berkowitz, 1988) that are crucial for dealing with the non-routine challenges in a constantly changing business environment (Morey & Luthans, 1991). Indeed, organizational survival and continued competitive advantage require that employees coordinate, collaborate, and exchange various tangible and intangible resources (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Barney, Ketchen & Wright, 2011; Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Borgatti & Lopez-Kidwell, 2011). Accordingly, the study of employee relationships has become essential to management theories (Allen & de Tormes Eby, 2012; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Grant & Parker, 2009).

Most relationships in organizations are derived from the organization's formal structure, with individuals dividing into teams and departments that create both opportunities and the need for greater interaction (Burt, 2001). Yet, individuals maintain the discretion to form other relationships, and to invest more or less time and attention in others based on their own personal preferences. Recent work suggests that these discretional relationships form primarily because of interpersonal affect, even when more competent alternative partners are available for collaboration (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005, 2008, 2014). Less clear is how employee relationships develop over time. Do initial social bonds improve, remain static, or decline? We propose a model to explain how one-to-one dyadic relationships in organizations evolve, based on the fundamental insight that both the hedonic tone of the affect experienced when socially

interacting, and more crucially the level of activation experienced, provide the underlying thrust for relationship changes. Our approach combines social network research (Borgatti, Brass, & Halgin, 2014; Kilduff & Brass, 2010) with a socio-functional view of emotions, which argues that affective exchanges actively shape relational dynamics (Hareli & Hess, 2012; Hareli, Rafaeli, & Parkinson, 2008, Parkinson, 1996).

Organizational social network research, a key perspective in the study of workplace relationships, focuses on relations within complex networks of formal and informal relationships, which provide both constraints and opportunities (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004). Social network research argues that positions within organizational networks rather than individual attributes (e.g., personality or demographics) drive attitudes, cognition, resource flows, and behavior (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, & Labianca, 2009). Social network theories either use structural factors (e.g., the position that people hold within organizational networks) or the content of connections (e.g., the type of relationships) to explain such outcomes (Borgatti & Foster, 2003).

Organizational social network research is limited, however, in that it takes a rather cold and rational view of relationships, focusing on the instrumental, task-related side of relational activity, seeking to explain the utility of particular network positions or connections as they relate to goals and performance outcomes (e.g., Burt, 2001). Consequently, the affective side is relegated to the personal rather than the working world (Casciaro & Lobo 2008; Labianca, 2014; Turner & Stets, 2005). Yet outside the network tradition, affect is seen as a powerful motivator of behavior (Barsade, Brief, & Spataro, 2003; Barsade & Gibson, 2007), with a crucial functional role in social relationships (Fischer & Manstead, 2008; Fridja & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Van Kleef, 2009), perhaps superseding instrumental concerns when

employees choose colleagues for collaboration (e.g., Casciaro & Lobo, 2008, 2014).

To our knowledge, only two social network theories have examined affect in relationship dynamics. Lawler's (2001) affect theory of social exchange argues that social exchanges produce affective states that can generate stronger or weaker connections to individuals, groups, or networks. The exchange of valued resources is the key driver for interactions. Pleasant affect is a valued resource because it provides rewarding feelings and encourages positive interactions, whereas unpleasant affect is unrewarding and instead carries a cost. When interaction partners enjoy their interactions, the affect strengthens the relationship, but when interactions leave them feeling emotionally depleted, the relationship is weakened. Casciaro's (2014) theory of relational affect argues that the affect a person usually feels when interacting with a given partner influences the extent to which people wish to form relationships with others at work. The affective rewards obtained from pleasant relational affect are predicted to moderate the extent to which instrumental criteria (e.g., the task competence of work partner) influence the formation of work relationships.

Building on those two theories, we present a refined model of affective relational dynamics. Like Lawler and Casciaro, our model fits within the connectionist perspective of social networks research, by focusing on the affective content of people's connections to explain how relationships evolve. Yet our model extends that work in three key ways. First, we are more nuanced in distinguishing between affective states within relationships. Theorists have distinguished relational affect as indicating pleasant or unpleasant feelings to predict whether relationships will start or end, or strengthen or weaken, but this approach has not enabled predictions about the specific trajectory of relationships and how this might change over time. The broader affect literature differentiates between affective states beyond simple pleasantness.

In our model, we additionally differentiate affect according to the activation level of states (Russell, 1980). This more fine-grained analysis allows a more complex understanding of how affect influences relational dynamics, because more highly activated states cause an impetus for change within relationships. Thus our model can predict a range of possible trajectories within relationships, including improving, declining, and remaining static over time, with respect to the frequency of voluntary interaction and level of closeness. This approach also addresses a recurring criticism that social networks literature considers networks and the underlying relationships as being relatively stable (Barabasi & Albert, 1999; Brass & Halgin, 2012; Moreno, 1953; Nadel, 1957; Weesie & Flap, 1990).

Second, we integrate key insights from social network theory explaining that relationships may be reciprocated or unreciprocated (Krackhardt, 1992; Nelson, 1989; Schechter & Yuskavage, 2011). Similarly, affect within relationships may be symmetric (i.e., both people in the relationship reciprocate the same feelings) or asymmetric (i.e., both parties have different feelings) – and the degree of reciprocity may have implications for relational dynamics. For example, pleasant affect makes people want to form relationships, while unpleasant affect reduces desires to relate (Casciaro, 2014; Lawler, 2001). However, if one member of a dyad experiences pleasant affect and the other experiences unpleasant affect, or if one experiences a low activation level of pleasant affect (e.g., calmness) while the other experiences a high activation level of pleasant affect (e.g., excitement), the effects on that relationship may not be as straightforward to predict. In our model, we examine the implications of reciprocity on the relationship trajectory.

Third, integrating insights from the affect literature, we show that affect is episodic. Social network theorists have focused on *relational affect* capturing how people typically feel when

they interact with a relationship partner. We refine this terminology to refer to *trait relational affect*, capturing the relatively enduring nature of the affect that characterizes a relationship over time, and differentiate this from the *state relational affect* that is experienced during a single interchange. In our model, we explain how trait relational affect sets the trajectory of relationships, while also accounting for how episodes of state relational affect punctuate this equilibrium and can make temporary or even permanent changes to this trajectory.

We therefore contribute to the social network literature by addressing the relatively neglected affective side of relational activity and providing a more dynamic and nuanced approach to relationship evolution. We also contribute to the affect literature by providing a novel framework considering affect as relational (interpersonal) rather than individual (intrapersonal) (Hareli, Rafaeli & Parkinson, 2008; Van Kleef, 2009; Van Kleef,, VanDoorn, Heerdink & Koning, 2011), wherein both partners may have symmetric or asymmetric affective experiences. Providing insight into the trajectory of dyadic relations through the lens of trait and state relational affect also has organizational implications, because the trajectories we differentiate ultimately lead to the development of distinctive types of informal work connections or *social ties*. The different types of ties define the "social ledger" of relationships formed as employees become embedded in the organization's social structure, and can offer organizationally relevant benefits or liabilities (Labianca & Brass, 2006; Labianca, Brass & Gray, 1998).

Next, we review the broad research on affect within organizations. We then introduce a new perspective that draws on the circumplex model of affect (Russell, 1980) to consider the activation level as well as the hedonic tone of the affect usually experienced during interactions with a given partner (*trait relational affect*), and that considers the possibility for the affect

experienced by relationship partners to be symmetric or asymmetric. Based on this perspective, we propose implications of various dyadic combinations of relational affect in terms of the likely relational trajectory to occur over time. We then consider how *state relational affect* during salient interchanges can disrupt and alter the relational trajectory. We conclude by suggesting research applications and extensions within this framework.

AFFECT IN ORGANIZATIONS

Affect, the state of feeling, has been typically conceptualized and operationalized as a state and a trait phenomenon. The state perspective is consistent with most lay views that affect is highly dynamic in response to events. The view is also supported by decades of experience sampling research demonstrating that momentary affective states fluctuate daily, hourly, or even minute-to-minute (e.g., Fisher, 2000). In contrast, the trait perspective assumes that people have a typical form of affect that they usually experience and return back to after being punctuated by particular affective episodes. This trait affect is best characterized as a kind of homeostatic baseline around which episodic affect fluctuates, and represents the average of the feelings that a person experiences over time, developed as a result of the many interactions people have with the world around them (Watson & Clark, 1984).

While early research on organizational affect focused on people's private experiences of their feelings, researchers increasingly recognize that affective states "cannot be disentangled from the social world" (Tiedens & Leach, 2004: 2). Theories suggest that not only does affect serve social functions important to organizational life, including communication, cooperation, and social striving (Barbalet, 2001; Parkinson, 1996), but it most typically arises from ongoing relationships or interactions with a partner (Lazarus, 1968). In fact, many types of affect can only be experienced with reference to one's relationship with another person, including

embarrassment, envy, gratitude, and love (Parkinson, 1996). Even further is the argument that affect *is* social relationships; that affective states are located between rather than within individuals, and that qualitatively different states are "transformations of the relationship between person and other" (de Rivera & Grinkis, 1986: 351). This suggests a need to conceive of affect as a relational phenomenon that, while felt by individuals, is triggered and experienced within the context of a dyad.

AN AFFECTIVE MODEL OF RELATIONSHIPS

Our model is designed to explain how interpersonal affect dynamically influences relationships within organizations. We integrate both trait and state perspectives to consider how relationships evolve according to trait and state relational affect. Our differentiation between types of feelings is more fine-grained than previous theorizing, going beyond the pleasant versus unpleasant dimension to also differentiate between states according to activation levels. We further integrate social network theory insights regarding reciprocity, by acknowledging that affect within relationships may be symmetric or asymmetric, and that the degree of reciprocity has implications for relational dynamics.

Relationship Trajectory and Social Ties

In our model, we seek to predict the type of *change that will occur within relationships* between two organizational members over time (i.e., the relationship trajectory: improving, static, or declining) and the *destination that relationships will likely reach* in terms of the type of informal social connection that will develop, should they remain on a given trajectory (i.e., the tie type: strong, weak, or negative; see Table 1).[1] Different relationship trajectories vary according to the changes over time in the frequency with which partners voluntarily interact and the closeness of their interactions. The type of ties that can arise within relationships vary

according to the extent of trust, support, and intimacy and the valence of the schema that each partner holds in relation to the other. Within each tie type there may also be variation in the intensity of the tie, such that, for example, strong ties may vary from somewhat strong (e.g., a friendship) to very strong (e.g., best friends).

Insert Table 1 about here

An improving trajectory indicates an upwards trend within a relationship, such that two individuals engage more frequently out of choice and on a deeper level of closeness. Over time, if a relationship continues along an improving trajectory, it will likely develop into a strong social tie characterized by a high exchange of trust and social support, intimacy, and a positive person schema (Granovetter, 1973; Krackhardt, 1992; Wellman & Berkowitz, 1988).

When a relationship is on a static trajectory, individuals seek neither additional engagement nor avoidance, meaning that the relationship neither improves nor declines with respect to the frequency of voluntary interaction and closeness. A relationship that begins and remains on this type of trajectory is likely to evolve into a weak social tie. According to Granovetter (1973), weak ties are low intimacy relationships that typically involve a weakly positive level of trust and support and a neutral person schema, akin to acquaintances or friends of friends. If relationships remain on a static trajectory such that weak ties are not attended to, they may eventually become dormant. Dormant ties can be seen as ties in hibernation, when individuals have been non-communicative for a long time but the option of a future reconnection continues to exist (Levin, Walter, & Murnighan, 2011). In Table 1, dormant ties would then fall within the broader category of weak ties, as the most extreme (weak) example of this category.

Finally, the declining trajectory represents a downwards trend in the relationship, wherein

partners actively avoid one another where possible, observable by decreases in voluntary interactions and the level of closeness. A relationship on this type of trajectory is likely to evolve into a negative social tie, "an enduring, recurring set of negative judgments, feelings, and behavioral intentions toward another person—a negative person schema" that involves distrust and undermining (Labianca & Brass, 2006: 597). Ultimately, if negative ties continue to decline, they may become toxic, with greater intensity of dislike and distrust between partners (Dutton, 2003; Frost, 2003). In such cases, relationship conflict may become so intense that workarounds may become an accepted part in the organizational workflow so that the two individuals need no longer interact (Jehn, 1997). In Table 1, toxic ties would then fall under the broader category of negative ties, as the most extreme (negative) example of this category.

Trait and State Relational Affect

In our model, we build on the emerging paradigm that treats affect as a social, relational phenomenon (e.g., de Rivera & Grinkis, 1986), and adopt Casciaro's concept of relational affect, which she defines as "a dyadic construct that captures how a specific ego tends to feel when interacting with a specific alter" (Casciaro, 2014: 225-226). In particular, we distinguish two forms of relational affect: trait and state. Consistent with Casciaro's original conceptualization, we use the term *trait relational affect* to describe the idea that relationships comprise an affective baseline regarding how one partner typically feels when interacting with the other. This construct corresponds to the trait perspective on affect; while the term trait usually reflects something relatively enduring about an individual, we use the term to denote something relatively enduring about a relationship, developed over repeated interactions. Diverging from Casciaro's (2014) original conceptualization, we use the term *state relational affect* to describe the relational affect that is experienced during, or in response to, specific relational events (i.e., events and

interactions that occur within a relationship). This latter construct corresponds to the perspective of affect as a state, dynamic phenomenon, because state relational affect is transient in nature. State relational affect may be consistent with or divergent from trait relational affect, depending on the specific relational event that has caused the state affect and how characteristic this is of the relationship.

We argue that both trait and state forms of relational affect can be differentiated along the dual dimensions of hedonic tone and activation level, which have been used to describe and differentiate both stable and transient affective experiences (e.g., Mauss & Robinson, 2009; Posner, Russell, & Peterson, 2005). Hedonic tone concerns affective valence, ranging from unpleasant to pleasant, and activation level concerns the level of arousal, engagement or alertness, ranging from activated to deactivated. These two dimensions form the affective circumplex (Larsen & Diener 1992; Russell, 1980, 2003), and combine to distinguish four types of affect: (1) pleasant activated (PA), characterized by positive emotions such as happiness, enthusiasm, excitement, and alertness; (2) pleasant deactivated (PD), characterized by contentment, relaxation, calmness, and boredom; (3) unpleasant activated (UA), characterized by tension, nervousness, stress, and anger; and (4) unpleasant deactivated (UD), characterized by fatigue, lethargy, guilt, and sadness (Figure 1). Although the circumplex is an intrapersonal model that describes internal feeling states, it is appropriate for conceptualizing relational affect, in the sense that people are motivated to attribute the feelings that they experience in relationships to those with whom they are interacting (Lawler, 2001).

Insert Figure 1 about here

State relational affect is experienced as a result of people's cognitions about the

significance of relational events for a given relationship, i.e., appraisals (Lazarus, 1968; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). While the specific events that cause state relational affect may be highly variable, the underlying patterns of appraisals will be consistent. Primary appraisals about whether a relational event is salient to the relationship will influence whether or not affect is experienced, while secondary appraisals about the meaning of relational events will influence the type of state relational affect that is experienced. For example, an appraisal of an event as salient to the relationship and involving 'other-blame', i.e., blaming the relationship partner for something that went wrong, is expected to underlie the experience of relational anger, which is a form of UA affect.

Instances of state relational affect effectively serve as the building blocks of trait relational affect, in the sense that trait relational affect is the accumulation, over time, of affective responses to the relational events that have occurred within a relationship. In particular, the strongest impacts on trait relational affect come from *relationship-defining memories*, which are "specific significant events that occur during the course of an interpersonal relationship and are vividly and emotionally remembered" (Alea & Vick, 2010: 730). Such memories stem from pivotal interactions or events that define a relationship, reflect an enduring relational theme, are frequently remembered, and remain salient. They are relationship defining in the sense that they anchor a person's sense of the relationship over time. For example, Little, Hinojosa, and Lynch, (2017) recently described how disclosure of pregnancy to a supervisor can prove a relationship-defining memory for many female employees, because the supervisor's reaction provides crucial clues about the future quality and nature of the working relationship at a time when such employees may perceive ambiguity.

Trait relational affect will form rather quickly in new relationships, in part because the

events that occur earlier on in relationships tend to be more salient (and therefore relationship-defining), due to a lack of other reference points. However, trait relational affect will certainly become more stable over longer time-periods, under the condition that the various events that are experienced in the context of the relationship elicit similar state relational affect. Indeed, this eventuality is relatively likely, because trait relational affect serves as a lens through which relational events are appraised, meaning that trait relational affect has a reciprocal influence on state relational affect. For example, if a colleague congratulates you for getting a promotion you both wanted, the state relational affect you would experience might depend on your trait relational affect. If you and the colleague shared PA trait relational affect, you would probably interpret the relational event as a genuine attempt to congratulate you and feel pride. Conversely, if you and the colleague shared UA trait relational affect, you might perceive that the congratulation is a sarcastic attempt to undermine your achievement and feel contempt.

Also shaping relational affect are contextual factors that influence the likelihood of particular types of relational events. For example, whether the interaction partners work in competitive or collaborative environments will influence the chance of interpersonal conflicts (De Dreu, 2008; Zia & Syed, 2013). Trait affectivity — a personality trait that is expressed through the tendency to see things in a positive or negative way, will further influence how a person typically appraises relational events, e.g., people who have unpleasant trait affectivity are likely to make negative appraisals (Decker & Borgen, 1993; Lam, Yik, & Schaubroeck, 2002). Finally, a person's affective presence—an individual difference pertaining to the feelings a person tends to unconsciously elicit in others (Eisenkraft & Elfenbein, 2010) and interpersonal affect regulation—deliberate attempts to regulate others' feelings (Niven, Holman, & Totterdell, 2012) will influence how relationship partners feel when interacting with each other.

Trait Relational Affect's Impact on the Relationship Trajectory

In forming propositions regarding relationship trajectories, we make four fundamental assumptions. The first is that the relationship trajectory will depend on the combination of the hedonic tone and activation of trait relational affect. Hedonic tone is expected to determine the *direction of movement* within a relationship. That is, pleasant states are rewarding and will foster future interactions based on expectations of future rewards. In contrast, unpleasant states are unrewarding and may be experienced as punishments; as such, they are less likely to generate future interactions (Casciaro, 2014; Lawler, 2001). The implication is that pleasant trait relational affect should move relationship partners closer together, whereas unpleasant trait relational affect should push them apart. In support of this assumption, prior research finds that individuals in the workplace are motivated to further interact with others whom they like and avoid those they dislike, even when the disliked individuals offered better expertise (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005, 2008, 2014).

We further expect activation levels to influence the *impetus for movement* within a relationship. High activation states motivate greater goal-oriented activity whereas low activation states increase stagnation (Dutton, 2003). This idea derives from two research literatures. First, self-regulatory perspectives (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1981; Higgins, 1998) argue that activated affective states have energizing potential, whereas deactivated states lack impetus for action (Warr, Bindl, Parker, & Inceoglu, 2014). Second, Collins's (1981) theory about the sociology of social interactions argues that the activation component of affect influences a person's confidence in his or her ability to enjoy the potential rewards from the relationship that emanate from pleasant relational affect. Thus, higher activation states are likely to provide greater impetus toward movement in relationships, either motivating people to become closer or more

distant, depending on whether the state is pleasant or unpleasant in hedonic tone. In contrast, lower activation states are less likely to prompt extreme changes in relationship dynamics.

Our second assumption in forming our propositions is that that individuals who share a relationship might not always experience trait relational affect similarly toward each other. Symmetrical trait relational affect develops when partners similarly appraise the events that have characterized their relationship (Lazarus, 1968; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), share similar affective presence, or have mutual preferences regarding interpersonal affect regulation. Conversely, when relationship partners appraise relational events differently (either differing with respect to how relevant or important events are for the relationship, or regarding the meaning of events), have divergent affective presence, or have conflicting interpersonal affect regulation styles, asymmetric trait relational affect will develop. While relationship partners' feelings do often converge over time, for example, due to converging appraisal styles and primitive processes like emotional contagion (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003), research has also documented strong evidence of divergence in trait relational affect over time. For example, research suggests that people can develop complementary interpersonal affect regulation styles within romantic relationships that cause differences in the affect they tend to elicit in their relationship partners (e.g., Parkinson, Simons, & Niven, 2016), over time leading to differences in trait relational affect. Moreover, there are likely to be cases where differences in appraisals between relationship partners become chronic and entrenched (e.g., in bully-victim relationships; Hunter, Mora-Merchan, & Ortega, 2004). We therefore argue that it is important to consider the combination of how both interaction partners typically feel during their interactions.

The third assumption underlying our propositions regards what happens in the instance that the trait relational affect of each relationship partner would suggest a different path for the

relationship. We suggest, in line with the negative asymmetry hypothesis, which predicts that negative events, feelings and relationships are more salient and have stronger effects compared to their positive counterparts (Labianca & Brass, 2006), that the direction of movement dictated by a partner who has unpleasant trait relational affect will trump the direction of movement dictated by a pleasant trait relational affect partner. Further, in line with research and theory on energy and activation (e.g., Collins, 1981; Warr et al., 2014), the impetus for movement of high activation states will trump that of low activation states, even in such cases wherein bad would otherwise be stronger than good (i.e., high activation pleasant trait relational affect will have a stronger effect on the relationship than low activation unpleasant trait relational affect).

Our final assumption is that, when forming our propositions, we hold instrumental value constant. Employees tend to consider instrumental value independently from affective motivations when evaluating their relationships, and affective motivations dominate in the choice of interaction partners (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005, 2008, 2014). Thus, while we assume that all else is equal with respect to the task-related abilities, competencies, and resources of the interaction partner, our expectation is that even in the case of inequalities in instrumental value, the impact of relational affect on the trajectory of a relationship would be greater than that of instrumentality (an effect termed 'affective primacy' by Casciaro & Lobo, 2014). Next we review the various possible dyadic trait relational affect combinations and their effect on the trajectory that the relationship will follow (Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Trait Relational Affect Combinations Leading to an Improving Relationship Trajectory

In a relationship that is on an improving trajectory, partners engage more frequently on a

voluntary basis and with an increasing level of closeness. We argue that pleasant activation (PA) is the type of trait relational affect most likely to stimulate an improving relational trajectory. The pleasant hedonic tone activates rewards systems; the high activation level adds motion and action (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). Both elements are mutually reinforcing and crucial for positive exchanges.

When both partners typically experience PA during their interactions, the relationship should therefore improve rapidly over time because both are fairly equally motivated to enhance the relationship. Improving should also occur, albeit more slowly, if one partner typically experiences PA while the other usually experiences PD (pleasant deactivation), because the PA partner will be motivated to further engage and deepen the relationship, while the PD party will be receptive to deriving rewards from the relationship. The main affective cost to the PD party is a lower level of energy from the interaction. However, simply receiving attention from the PA party requires no effort, so costs should not outweigh beneficial pleasant feelings from the relational activity. Finally, improving is predicted if one partner typically experiences PA while the other usually experiences UD (unpleasant deactivation). Even though the UD party will experience negativity during interactions, he or she will lack the motivation necessary to do anything particularly active to oppose the relationship strengthening attempts of the PA party, meaning that the relationship should still improve, although rather slowly. Over time, relationships on a improving trajectory will develop into strong ties that confer many organizationally relevant benefits, including higher performance, satisfaction, citizenship behavior, and commitment (see Chiaburu & Harrison's, 2008, meta-analysis).

> *Proposition 1. A work relationship between two individuals evaluated by: a) symmetric trait relational affect PA/PA or b) asymmetric trait relational affect PA/PD or c) asymmetric trait relational affect PA/UD will likely be on a trajectory that is improving.*

Proposition 1a. The symmetric affect (PA/PA) relationship will improve most quickly, followed by the PA/PD relationship, then the PA/UD relationship.[2]

Proposition 1b. Over time, relationships on an improving trajectory will result in a strong tie between relationship partners.

Trait Relational Affect Combination Leading to a Static Relationship Trajectory

In relationships on a trajectory that is static, the relationship neither improves nor declines but remains in a status quo state, with the frequency of voluntary interaction and level of closeness remaining the same (Levin, Walter, & Murnighan, 2011). We expect trait relational affect characterized by PD (pleasant deactivated) and that characterized by UD (unpleasant deactivated) to show static inactivity, due to the deactivated nature of the relational affect. People with PD trait relational affect may experience interactions as pleasant and rewarding, but the energy level is so low that impetus for increasing interaction, goal-oriented behavior, and positive rewards would lack reinforcement. Thus people with PD relational affect would not actively pursue further or deeper relational activity with their partners. Meanwhile, people with UD trait relational affect would share the lack of motivation to expend further energy or invest further time and resources in the relationship. Even though those with UD trait relational affect would also experience negativity due to the unpleasant affect that colors interactions, the deactivation of the state would result in a similar lack of motivation to take action to end the relationship.

When both interaction partners typically experience PD or UD during interactions, we therefore expect the relationship to maintain a static trajectory. Likewise, we expect a static trajectory if one experiences PD while other experiences UD trait relational affect. If circumstances dictate greater interaction between relationship partners (e.g., due to shared team membership on an intensive project), the trajectory may change over time, however. Under these

circumstances, a PD/PD relationship might slowly improve, due to the pleasant rewards inherent in the interactions, whereas a UD/UD relationship might slowly decline, due to the punishments experienced during interactions.

Over time, relationships that begin and remain on a static trajectory will develop into weak social ties. Although weak ties do not have the same obvious benefits as strong ties, they still hold an important role in the functioning of organizations. Benefits of weak ties derive from the fact that they provide access to novel information beyond that available from closer social ties (Granovetter, 1973), meaning that they lead to outcomes such as creativity, innovation, and knowledge transfer (Borgatti & Lopez-Kidwell, 2011; Granovetter 1983; Levin & Cross, 2004). Ultimately, if a relationship characterized by a weak tie continues on a static trajectory, it may form a dormant tie, wherein interaction ceases altogether, even if the potential still remains for later reactivation. Dormant ties can, however, continue to remain useful in terms of novel knowledge search because they can still be diverse and efficient to access (Levin, Walter, & Murnighan, 2011).

> *Proposition 2. A work relationship between two individuals evaluated by: a) symmetric trait relational affect PD/PD or b) symmetric trait relational affect UD/UD or c) asymmetric trait relational affect PD/UD will likely be on a trajectory that is static.*
>
> *Proposition 2a. Over time, relationships that begin and remain on a static trajectory will result in a weak tie between relationship partners.*[3]

Trait Relational Affect Combinations Leading to a Declining Relationship Trajectory

Partners in relationships on a declining trajectory will actively avoid each other and avoid deepening the quality of their interactions when possible. We propose that, at the individual-level, the declining relationship trajectory is associated with the UA (unpleasant activated) quadrant of the affective circumplex, in which the negative hedonic tone triggers punishment and

causes individuals to dread future interactions (Lawler, 2001) while the high activation level motivates goal-oriented action (Dutton, 2003) to actively avoid such states.

We therefore argue that the symmetric UA/UA combination will lead to relationships declining most quickly. Both parties are highly motivated to avoid one another. If circumstances force them to interact, the exchange is difficult and tense. Three further asymmetric combinations are predicted to lead to a declining relationship trajectory, in decreasing order of speed: UA/UD, UA/PD, and UA/PA. In all cases, the high activation and impetus for movement imbued by the UA state is the key to driving the downward trend in the relationship. When paired with a partner with UD trait relational affect, the UD party has no motivation to engage and interactions for this person have a negative flavor anyway, leading to relatively speedy decline. When paired with a PD partner, the PD party similarly lacks motivation to change the relationship, even though interactions may be experienced relatively positively, leading to decline as the UA party's efforts to push the PD party away are not met with any active resistance. Finally, when paired with a partner with PA trait relational affect, even though the PA party might invest time and resources in trying to improve the relationship, negative asymmetry is likely to force the relationship into decline, albeit somewhat slowly as the efforts of the PA party may decelerate the downward trend.

Over time, relationships on a declining trajectory will develop into negative ties between relationship partners, which are suggested to cause a range of undesirable outcomes including poor well-being and performance, interpersonal conflicts and counterproductive behaviors, as well as low levels of cohesion, commitment, and motivation (Labianca & Brass, 2006; Labianca, Brass, & Gray, 1998). If negative ties continue on the declining trajectory for long periods, they may become toxic. Toxic ties are extremely damaging to well-being and the ability to meet work

expectations (Dutton, 2003; Frost, 2003; Lawrence, 2008). They may also spill over to damage broader team or organizational performance because warring parties may introduce workarounds that change formal and informal process structures and routines to allow them to avoid interaction and the unpleasantness it evokes (Jehn, 1997), and such ties might even become the basis for the formation of warring factions within the broader work unit.

Proposition 3. A work relationship between two individuals evaluated by: a) symmetric trait relational affect UA/UA or b) asymmetric trait relational affect UA/UD or c) asymmetric trait relational affect UA/PD or d) asymmetric trait relational affect UA/PA will likely be on a trajectory that is declining.

Proposition 3a. The symmetric affect (UA/UA) relationship will decline most quickly, followed by the UA/UD relationship, then the UA/PD relationship, then the UA/PA relationship.

Proposition 3b. Over time, relationships on a declining trajectory will result in a negative tie between relationship partners.

State Relational Affect's Influence on the Relationship Trajectory

Although trait relational affect primarily determines the trajectory that a relationship follows, we argue that state relational affect can temporarily or permanently alter the trajectory. Our arguments are founded on the assumption that state relational affect influences the trajectory of a relationship to the extent that it differs from the trait relational affect typical in the relationship. Because trait relational affect serves as a lens through which relational events are appraised, state and trait relational affect will usually be consistent in a relationship, such that state relational affect simply feeds into the overall general feelings typical of the relationship and has little bearing on its trajectory. However, sometimes state relational affect diverges from the trait relational affect. We argue that at those times the relationship trajectory is highly likely to change.

When relational events elicit state relational affect that diverges from trait relational affect,

the relationship may reach a "turning point". Deriving from the romantic relationships literature, turning points are events or occurrences that are associated with change in a relationship (Bolton, 1961). A crucial feature of turning points is the occurrence of an event that is atypical in relation to the norm in that relationship, in the sense that something special, unique, or unexpected occurs (Baxter & Bullis, 1986), prompting a divergence between how people feel in that moment about their relationship partner (i.e., their state relational affect) and how they usually feel (i.e., their trait relational affect), which ultimately transforms the path of the relationship. For example, within mentoring relationships, turning points include being singled out for recognition, unexpected acts of support, and relational clashes (Bullis & Bach, 1989).

Accordingly, we expect that state relational affect that diverges from trait relational affect can serve as a turning point to change the trajectory of a relationship. Based on theory and research showing that hedonic tone determines whether a relationship is punishing or rewarding, which then influences whether parties want to interact in the future (e.g., Lawler, 2001), when state relational affect differs in hedonic tone to trait relational affect we suggest that the direction of the relationship trajectory may change (e.g., from improving to declining). Conversely, and commensurate with assumptions that activation influences energy expended on a relationship (e.g., Warr et al., 2014), we expect that when state relational affect differs in activation to trait relational affect, this may influence the impetus for movement within the relationship and therefore either slow down or hasten the trajectory.

For example, a relationship characterized by the asymmetric trait relational affect UA/PD would be on a trajectory that is declining. Relational events causing person A (i.e., the UA party) to feel anger (a UA state), e.g., B publicly insults A during a meeting, will be integrated into the trait relational affect with no major effect on the relational path. However, relational events

causing A to feel excitement (a PA state, indicating a divergence in hedonic tone from the trait relational affect), e.g., B gives a thoughtful gift to A, would cause A to anticipate future rewards from interacting with B and experience a high impetus for movement in the relationship, meaning that the relationship may change direction to an improving trajectory. In contrast, relational events causing A to feel boredom (a UD state, indicating divergence in activation from the trait relational affect) would reduce the impetus for movement in the relationship while maintaining the lack of rewards from interactions, potentially slowing down in the declining trajectory of the relationship.

> *Proposition 4. The extent to which the trajectory of a work relationship between two individuals changes in direction in response to state relational affect will depend on the degree of divergence between the hedonic tone of state and trait relational affect.*

> *Proposition 5. The extent to which the trajectory of a work relationship between two individuals changes in speed in response to state relational affect will depend on the degree of divergence between the activation level of state and trait relational affect.*

State Relational Affect and Permanent Changes to the Relationship Trajectory

In most cases, state relational affect has only a short-term impact on the relationship path. The path will usually revert to its regular trajectory according to the baseline trait relational affect. However, the turning points prompted by state relational affect could elicit more permanent changes. The key difference between temporary versus longer-term shifts is the degree to which individuals have internalized state relational affect into their overriding feelings about the relationship. In other words, when state relational affect changes trait relational affect, more permanent changes can occur.

The theory of relationship-defining memories (Alea & Vick, 2010) explains that relationship-defining memories influence relationship trajectories precisely because of the intense and enduring feelings they elicit in relation to the interaction partner (Little, Hinojosa, &

Lynch, 2017). Consequently, we expect that when partners appraise relational events as extremely salient to their view of the relationship, enough to prompt reevaluation, the relationship trajectory may undergo sustained changes. Similarly, if the events that cause state relational affect are repeated relatively consistently over time, we can also expect trait relational affect to shift gradually, thus also leading to a more permanent change in the relationship trajectory. For example, a worker and a manager may have a relationship featuring symmetric PD/PD trait relational affect (e.g., calmness), which is on a trajectory that is static. If the worker is passed over for a promotion in favor of a less-competent candidate, the worker might perceive the event to be highly salient and feel state relational anger so intense as to prompt reevaluation of the relationship. Consequently, the relationship assumes a more UA trait relational affect (from the perspective of the worker) and assumes a declining trajectory. Or the worker might perceive that the manager repeatedly gives unfair deadlines. Any one such instance will be less salient, but over time the repeated experience of state relational anger will eventually lead to more permanent changes in trait relational affect and therefore in the relationship trajectory.

> *Proposition 6. Changes to the relationship trajectory may become permanent when the events that cause state relational affect are relationship-defining (i.e., they prompt a re-evaluation of the relationship), ultimately changing an individual's trait relational affect.*

> *Proposition 7. Changes to the relationship trajectory can become permanent when the events that cause state relational affect are repeated regularly, ultimately changing an individual's trait relational affect.*

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our model of relational affect provides a conceptual framework to gain new insights into how affect influences the dynamics of relationships over time. By considering various combinations of affect typically experienced within work dyads, we predict that relationships can improve, remain static, or decline over time. We further predict that feelings experienced within

specific interactions can punctuate and alter relational trajectories, temporarily or permanently.

Our conceptualization of affect within dyadic relationships is more precise than prior attempts to integrate affect into social networks (e.g., Casciaro, 2014; Lawler, 2001). Specifically, we draw on the circumplex model to apply more fine-grained distinctions regarding meaningful differences between affective experiences within relationships, and consider the implications of the affect within relationships being either symmetric or asymmetric. We also focus on typical (trait) and episodic (state) relational affect. Our theory therefore offers a more nuanced approach to understanding the evolution of relationships among organizational members.

Boundary Conditions

Our model has several boundary conditions, each of which could be empirically tested as possible extensions of our dynamic model. First, given the workplace context, the importance of trait and state relational affect might be influenced by the interdependence level of the task at hand within each dyad. If relationship partners' work is highly interdependent, the role of the relationship's instrumentality might outweigh the role of relational affect. Each party might not be able to let the relationships decline because of the strength of the situation in which their relationship is embedded. Instead, they might self-regulate to override any detrimental relational affect (Gross, 1998). By using affect regulation, individuals may be able to compartmentalize the instrumental value versus the affective value of the relationship. However, we anticipate that relationship partners who must regulate affect will suffer costs because regulating affect requires effort, meaning that it consumes valued resources and leads to strain (Diestel & Schmidt, 2011). Furthermore, the relationship is highly unlikely to improve in any meaningful way and might be an ongoing source of difficulty and conflict.

A second boundary condition regards power and status. Kemper (1991) argues that the gain or loss of power (the ability to coerce action regardless of the wishes of another) for oneself or others leads to the experience of various affective experiences. The difference in power between members of a dyad, and how this changes and shifts over time, may therefore influence how relational affect develops. For example, research suggests that people pay greater attention to the affective states of higher status individuals; thus, lower status individuals are more susceptible to being influenced by, or to 'catching' the affective states of powerful others (e.g., Hsee, Hatfield, & Chemtob, 1992). Power may likewise influence appraisal of relational events (e.g., events that are highly salient to lower status relationship partners may not even register with partners if a higher status). Additionally, parties in lower-power positions might be structurally bound to continue engaging in the relationship, even against their will. Thus, if a dyad includes a power differential, or if the balance of power shifts, so might the relational affect, and, in turn, the relationship trajectory.

A third boundary condition concerns personality. Certain individual characteristics, such as the so-called *dark triad* of narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), might lead individuals to see work relationships as purely instrumental in their nature. Indeed, individuals with such traits are often described as extremely instrumental in their functioning, viewing relational activity as merely a tool to achieve their goals and find self-gratification (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012). Such individuals might therefore have muted responses concerning the impact of trait and state relational affect on the trajectory of their relationships.

Research Applications and Extensions

Our model provides an overall framework through which additional extensions may be

tested. We outline three such possibilities below.

Discrete emotions. Our model differentiates types of state relational affect according to their hedonic tone and level of activation to explain their effects on the trajectory of a relationship. This dimensional approach to understanding state affect has been argued to be appropriate by many researchers. For example, Mauss and Robinson's (2009) review of the different ways that state affect can be measured, including self-report, behavioral measures, and various physiological indicators, concluded that "the bulk of the available evidence favors the idea that measures of emotional responding reflect dimensions rather than discrete states" (209). In other words, state affect can be categorized by using dimensions such as those proposed in the circumplex model. However, an alternative perspective is that affective states may be viewed as discrete emotions, and that these discrete emotions have subtly distinctive relational meanings (e.g., Frijda, 1986). Future research might therefore explore whether discrete state relational emotions that share similar hedonic tone and activation levels have the same or slightly different implications for work relationships over time.

Performance implications. Our model focuses on the likely trajectories of relationships based on the trait relational affect within the partnership and the influences of state relational affect. In our model, we consider how the trajectory a relationship assumes might lead to strong, weak, or negative informal work ties. Informal work ties are thought to be connected to various performance-related outcomes (e.g., motivation, proficiency, innovation; Borgatti & Foster, 2003), so future research could extend our model by testing predictions about how relational affect influences performance and other organizationally relevant outcomes, via their effects on the types of work ties that people form.

Moreover, future work could also consider how the performance implications of relational

affect can feed back into the affect experienced in relationships, ultimately leading to positive or negative dynamic spirals. For example, two people in a relationship characterized by symmetric PA/PA trait relational affect are likely to have a relationship that is on an improving trajectory, ultimately leading to strong ties and generating successful performance. The episodes of success that are likely to feature within such a relationship in turn should generate state relational joy (a PA state) and therefore feed into the PA trait relational affect. Conversely, relationships characterized by UA trait relational affect are on a declining trajectory and more likely to generate performance failures, causing state relational anger, and therefore feeding into the UA trait relational affect.

Network level implications. A third important extension is in the social network research area itself. The contribution our model currently makes to the social network literature is distinctive in that we seek to address new and different questions that are highly relevant to social network researchers. For example, traditionally in social network literature researchers have sought to understand what makes a tie between two people exist or disappear, whereas our model sheds light on what happens to a tie once formed in terms of the changes it undergoes over time and why these changes arise. Moreover, while social network theorists have focused on the unit of the triad in order to understand network dynamics, our model takes dyads as the building block of analysis, seeking to explain how affect within dyadic relationships can explain changes within dyadic relations, which could ultimately influence changes in the structure and composition of networks. Crucially, our model could be extended to relational affect within triads. Work on triads so far has used the well-known balance theory (Heider, 1958) to investigate the need for cognitive and affective consistency as the primary motivators that drive triadic relational changes over time, in pursuit of structural balance (Cartwright & Harary, 1956).

However the theory is based on a simplistic perspective of affect that concerns global symmetric affective attitudes (positive versus negative relationships), which neglects the richness of affective experience. It also says nothing about which members of the triad will be most motivated to change the triad's structure. To extend and more precisely develop structural balance theory, future research could adapt our dynamic conceptualization of relational affect along hedonic tone *and* activation level dimensions to consider the unique relationship-based affective experiences of each member of a triad.

Social network research could also benefit from network-level examinations of relational affect. Affect can meaningfully be conceptualized and experienced at group levels, with consistency in the affect experienced within work teams or even organizations. Research in this area has typically investigated affect at group levels by simply examining aggregates of individual trait or state affect (e.g., George, 1995), and has lacked consideration about how group affect might influence the trajectory that groups take over time in terms of whether they improve, remain static, or decline. Applying the insights of our model suggests that relational affect could apply to higher levels as an aggregate of the affect that each network member typically experiences *in relation to the group* (trait relational group affect) or an aggregate of feelings experienced *in relation to the group during specific group meetings or events* (state relational group affect). In turn, it is likely that the group's relational affect is likely to have a dynamic influence on its trajectory, with implications for the group's likelihood of success. Studying affective processes at higher levels would also determine whether networks characterized by different types of relational affect are associated with various network measures such as cohesion, centralization, and clique formation.

Managerial & Practical Implications

Our model provides managers with the opportunity to recognize where the relationships that are least conducive to organizational success are likely to develop, before relationships have become too toxic and interventions will be unlikely to succeed, by identifying relationships in which high activation unpleasant affect is experienced. Such relationships are likely to become evident because people are prone to sharing emotional experiences and interactions, especially highly activated, more intense experiences (Rimé, 2009). One potential way to intervene in such circumstances might involve enlisting the support of mutual third parties in a relationship to help mediate interactions within the relationship in order to try to change the hedonic tone to be more pleasant, or to minimally reduce the activation level of the unpleasant affect.

Another implication of our model is that managers can use our framework to identify opportunities to intervene to avoid ties becoming dormant. While dormant ties are not wholly negative, in the sense that they can be reengaged at a future occasion, ties are typically more useful and conducive to success when they are maintained (i.e., when there is some form of interaction, where resources and information may more freely flow). Thus, if managers become aware that a relationship is heading towards dormancy, due to a lack of activation in the pleasant affect experienced by members of a dyad coupled with a lack of opportunity or requirement for interaction, they could encourage people to reactivate their ties to allow a greater flow of resources, for example, with the use of social events and mixers.

Our model may also have practical implications for individual employees. In particular, our model suggests the need for employees to be emotionally cognizant of how they feel within their relationships and to consider how their partners appear to feel, as this will provide crucial information about how the relationship is likely to develop over time, regardless of any instrumental motivations, such as expertise and efficiency. Being cognizant in this way might be

especially helpful during the early stages of relationship formation (e.g., when joining a new work team), as relational events early in a relationship have a particularly potent effect on the relational trajectory. For example, if an employee becomes aware that his or her relationship partner is experiencing unpleasant relational affect, the employee could strategically use interpersonal affect regulation (e.g., showing more interest in the partner's ideas or praising the partner's work) to help to make the partner's relational affect more pleasant and therefore improve the relationship's trajectory (Niven et al., 2012). Employees should also recognize the importance of relationship-defining events, which can alter a relationship trajectory permanently. For example, if an employee betrays a coworker's trust, our model suggests that even a very strong tie might never fully recover from such a transgression if the betrayal completely changes how the coworker feels within that relationship, which could have a variety of work-related consequences in turn.

In sum, we provide a framework for exciting new research that will further our understanding of the dynamic role of affect, relational activity, and salient relational events in workplace social relationships. We should therefore seek to more explicitly integrate relational affect into the study of social networks to better understand why relationships change over time. Affect is the glue to our social bonds (Turner & Stets, 2005) and a necessary lubricant to our interactions, which in turn profoundly influences our organizational social networks.

Footnotes

1. It should be noted that while, in our model, we expect that relationships that follow a given trajectory will over time likely lead to a particular type of social tie between relationship partners, the type of social tie between partners is not necessarily an indicator of the trajectory that the relationship is currently on. For example, as we predict, a relationship following an improving trajectory will over time lead to a strong social tie. Yet it is possible for a relationship characterized by a strong social tie to be on a declining trajectory (which, if the trajectory continued, would eventually turn the tie into a negative social tie), for instance due to a conflict between relationship partners.

2. We do not specify exact timescales for trait relational affect to influence relationship trajectories, nor for relationship trajectories to influence the development of tie types. Timescales will strongly depend on factors such as the frequency and context of interactions. For example, do they occur in person or via technology? Do they occur voluntarily or because of shared membership in a group?

3. As we discuss later, relationships can change from one trajectory to another due to changes in the state relational affect that is experienced in response to relational events. In the circumstance that a relationship that is improving or declining becomes static in its trajectory, the social tie between relationship partners will likely remain as it was at the point of the trajectory becoming static.

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TABLE 1: TYPOLOGY OF CONSTRUCTS IN THE AFFECTIVE MODEL OF RELATIONSHIPS

Relational Affect Type *(Affect experienced when interacting with a given person)*	**Relational Affect Characteristic** *(Hedonic tone and activation level)*
Trait Relational Affect	The enduring affect that characterizes a relationship over time, wherein dyadic combinations of hedonic tone and activation level set a relationship trajectory
State Relational Affect	Affect experienced during a single interchange that can make temporary or even permanent changes to a relationship trajectory

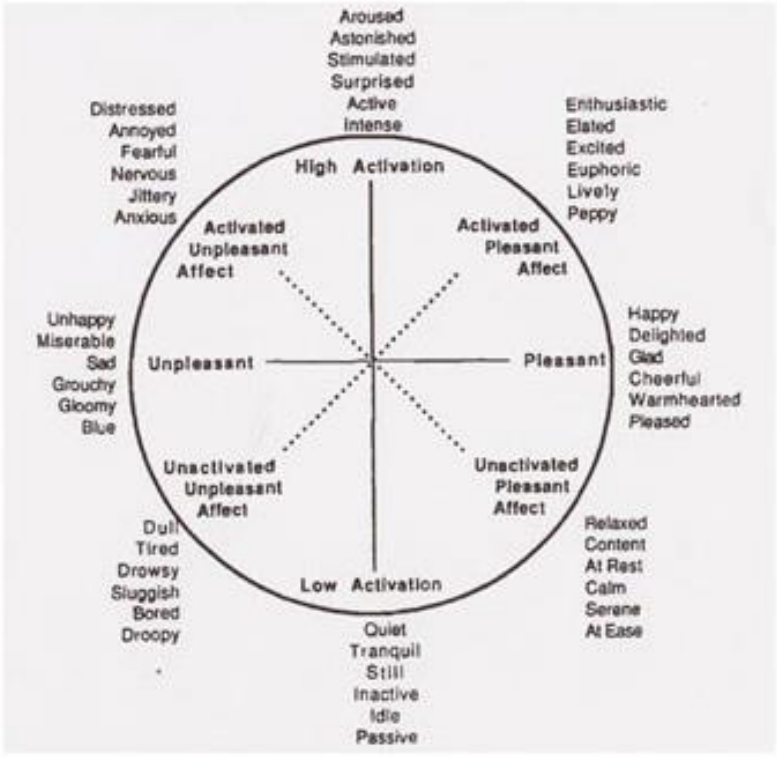
Relationship Trajectory Type *(Change that occurs within a relationship over time)*	**Relationship Trajectory Characteristic** *(Level of voluntary interaction and closeness)*
Improving	Increasing frequency of voluntary interaction and closeness
Static	No change in frequency of voluntary interaction and closeness
Declining	Decreasing frequency of voluntary interaction and closeness

Social Tie Type *(Social relationship created over time)*	**Social Tie Characteristic** *(Level of trust, support, and intimacy; valence of the person schema)*
Strong Tie (e.g., friendship)	Strongly positive level of trust, support, intimacy – a positive person schema
Weak Tie (e.g., acquaintance)	Weakly positive level of trust, support, intimacy – a neutral person schema
Negative Tie (e.g., adversary)	Distrust, undermining, and distance – a negative person schema

TABLE 2: LIKELY RELATIONSHIP TRAJECTORY FOR DYADIC COMBINATIONS OF TRAIT RELATIONAL AFFECT

Person j **Person i**	**Pleasant Activation (PA)**	**Pleasant Deactivation (PD)**	**Unpleasant Deactivation (UD)**	**Unpleasant Activation (UA)**
PA	IMPROVING	**--**	**--**	**--**
PD	IMPROVING	STATIC	**--**	**--**
UD	IMPROVING	STATIC	STATIC	**--**
UA	DECLINING	DECLINING	DECLINING	DECLINING

FIGURE 1: CIRCUMPLEX MODEL OF AFFECT



Source: Larsen & Diener, 1992