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### Kindness among colleagues

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**Kindness Among Colleagues; Identifying and Exploring The Gaps in Employment Contexts**

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International Journal of Organizational Analysis

## **Kindness Among Colleagues; Identifying and Exploring The Gaps in Employment**

### **Contexts**

### **Purpose**

‘Kindness among colleagues’ is a particular context for the scientific study of kindness which has been under-researched. There is scope within the burgeoning study of kindness for research concerned with employment contexts and colleagues, adopting an employment context appropriate construct of kindness, generating and considering evidence that might be evaluated rigorously in the employment context where kindness is both advocated and critiqued.

### **Design**

The literature review identifies and explores the gaps in kindness research in the employment context. A construct distinguishing a set of antecedents of kindness among colleagues was developed to address these gaps. The relevance and usefulness of the construct was tested in semi-structured interviews among some work colleagues in a specific organization setting.

### **Findings**

The results show that the four antecedents of kindness can be used to capture and explore perceptions and experiences of kindness among colleagues. There is scope for analysis at the levels of individuals, teams and organizations using data about these antecedents which allows for individual and more general workplace dynamics to be described and explored.

### **Research Limitations/ Implications**

The antecedents of kindness construct is validated to an extent by this initial study. The potential of this for describing and analysing kindness and workplace relevant themes makes it worth further development; to refine and validate an instrument for measuring kindness among colleagues.

### **Practical Implications**

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2  
3 Kindness among colleagues, if understood in the nuanced way presented here, can help  
4 individuals, teams and organizations review and evaluate themselves in diverse contexts.  
5  
6 Contexts can be expected to vary with workforce demographics, leadership style and  
7  
8 organization cultures.  
9

### 10 11 **Social Implications**

12  
13 Kindness is a burgeoning theme and concern across diverse social and cultural contexts for  
14 various reasons. The scientific contribution to the advocacy or critique of kindness, in this  
15 case kindness among colleagues, provides value in rigour, operationalization and evidencing  
16  
17 of the case for and against advocacy of the value of kindness in general.  
18  
19

### 20 21 **Originality/Value**

22  
23 This is a focused review and study of kindness among colleagues which contributes to the  
24 nomological and methodological development of a scientific approach to organizational  
25  
26 analysis concerns with this important theme in contemporary times.  
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30

### 31 32 **Keywords**

33  
34 Kindness, Antecedents, Operationalization, Outcomes, Colleagues  
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36

### 37 38 **Introduction**

39  
40 Kindness, initially to be defined as respectful concern, has been differentiated as a specific  
41 focus for scientific research (Lyubomirsky and Layous, 2013) emerging to prominence amidst  
42 some larger and grander themes, compassion (Miller et al., 2012) and altruism (Grant et al.,  
43 2009). Distinguishing kindness from these related constructs, to be able to consider how  
44 kindness itself is significant is a contemporary concern in social science as a whole (Canter *et*  
45 *al.* 2017) is here considered in the context of organization and employment. The current and  
46 continuing interest in these grand themes across social, economic and organizational life can  
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48 be complemented by research specifically on kindness itself.  
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5 The foundations for this exist in scientifically informed description and analysis of kindness  
6  
7 (Philips and Taylor 2009) with recent meta reviews of studies on kindness as a whole (Scott  
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9 Curry *et al.*, 2018 ) adding to this. The interest in and grounds for the claim of significant  
10  
11 kindness impacts are broad, stretching from a neurological case (Hamilton, 2010) to a  
12  
13 sociological case among whole populations in cities (Brownlie and Anderson, 2016). The  
14  
15 underlying belief is that being kind satisfies a range of human needs on the part of individual  
16  
17 givers and receivers (Marques, 2009; Goetz *et al.* 2010). This has been explored in studies of  
18  
19 kindness in education (Binfet and Passmore, 2017; Rowland 2009), with strangers (Sampson,  
20  
21 2003), in welfare (Fong, 2008), in healthcare (Chochinov, 2007; Jeffrey, 2016), in the  
22  
23 context of legal systems (Levit, 2000), interventions to improve wellbeing (Kirby, 2017), and  
24  
25 coping with distress (Stallman *et al.*, 2017).  
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### 31 **The Literature and Gaps In The Employment Context**

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34

35 Kindness as a theme in the organization and employment context, among colleagues, does  
36  
37 also exist (Grant, 2013; Taris *et al.*, 2009), though there are several gaps in this literature.  
38  
39 There are gaps in an employment oriented construct of kindness, in studies involving  
40  
41 colleagues in workplaces, in evidence associating kindness with outcomes at work, and in  
42  
43 addressing debates round the advocacy or critique of kindness as a feature of work relations.  
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47

48 The first gap is that no employment oriented construct of kindness has been developed. There  
49  
50 are a number of constructs kindness available in the general literature, seen in the meta  
51  
52 reviews being published in the area, but not a construct with that has explicit face and other  
53  
54 validity in the organization and employment context (Van Baalen and Jansen, 2008; Neilson,  
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1  
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3 2008) able to capture varying expectations and expressions of kindness in this context  
4  
5 (Sanderson and McQuilkin, 2017). The need is to develop and describe such a construct and  
6  
7 in the organization and employment context. This is important as the various levels of  
8  
9 description and analysis, individual, group and whole organization, have distinctive  
10  
11 characteristics that general constructs of kindness may not engage with. Individuals in  
12  
13 employment will have been recruited and selected to 'fit' within the workplace, they are not a  
14  
15 representative cross-section of the society as a whole (Edwards 1991). Groups in the  
16  
17 workplace with specified roles and relations between managers-employees, teams in  
18  
19 departments/units and early career-late career staff (Boxall 2013) will exist and be actively  
20  
21 managed through Human Resource Management (HRM) and this provides a distinctive and  
22  
23 significant context for studying kindness. At the level of the organization there are influences  
24  
25 from organization culture which influence the values and behavior of colleagues (Gehman *et*  
26  
27 *al.*, 2013). Given these contextual aspects to relations among colleagues the adoption of a  
28  
29 generic construct of kindness may not be useful to guide research.  
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35 The second gap is the lack of studies involving colleagues in workplaces. Kindness if it is  
36  
37 studied in workplace contexts as a concern is tangential, as a sub-set of other concerns (Grant  
38  
39 and Gino, 2010; Dhiman, 2010; Baker and O'Malley, 2008). For example, the benevolence  
40  
41 theme in constructs of trust in organizations (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987) includes kindness  
42  
43 (Thielmann and Hilbig, 2015); kindness implicitly featuring as part of emotional intelligence  
44  
45 in the workplace (Lall, 2009); organizational citizenship behaviors (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000)  
46  
47 and organization stewardship (Cruz *et al.*, 2010) entail reference to and association with  
48  
49 kindness. The need is for studies on kindness itself.  
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3 The third gap is the evidence gap for an association between kindness and outcomes of value  
4  
5 in the employment context. In the employment context a few studies mention commitment  
6  
7 and productivity and kindness (Atkins *et al.*, 2012) positive morale and reduced perceptions  
8  
9 of stress in work (Soylu, 2011) and service quality (Constant *et al.*, 1996). These studies  
10  
11 suggest that kindness can mitigate the effects of pressure to deliver and difficult situations,  
12  
13 such as losing staff (Iverson *et al.*, 2011) and sustain or increase life satisfaction, self-efficacy,  
14  
15 image and worth (Dhiman, op cit). Kindness can reportedly positively affect overall  
16  
17 organization reputation and success (Xie *et al.*, 2009) including the reporting unethical  
18  
19 behavior (Manroop *et al.*, 2014).  
20  
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24 The fourth gap is of a scientific perspective on kindness that addresses the debates between  
25  
26 advocacy and critique of kindness, specifically at work among colleagues. Research on  
27  
28 kindness contains what is essentially advocacy for kindness, in the guise of research studies  
29  
30 (Giacalone and Promislo, 2013). Others are more fundamentally critical, questioning kindness  
31  
32 (Ballat and Campling, 2011; Rome, 2017). In advocacy oriented studies kindness is  
33  
34 presumed to be an essentially and inherently positive value and principle, a strength of some  
35  
36 form if not indeed a virtue extolled (Walsh, 1999; Baron-Cohen, 2011). Studying kindness in  
37  
38 a way that presumes it's a good thing to advocate among colleagues may be perceived as a  
39  
40 form of 'virtue signaling' (Ambrosino, 2018) simply to be critiqued as naïvely expressing  
41  
42 support for commonly recognised decent things or by expressing a dislike of indecent things.  
43  
44 Alternatively kindness is to be approached more critically, and open to critique (Funicelli,  
45  
46 1993; Christiansen, 2017) essentially as kindness can be a part of and perpetuate imbalances  
47  
48 in power and control where conflicting interests exist. Rather than establishing a scientific  
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50 perspective to inform debates there is a division into advocates versus critics.  
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3 With these gaps there is scope for a contribution from a study of colleagues, adopting an  
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5 employment context appropriate construct of kindness, generating and considering evidence  
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7 that might be evaluated with science that balances advocacy and critique in the employment  
8  
9 context. To address these gaps requires in the first instance that a construct be developed for  
10  
11 research purposes.  
12  
13

### 14 15 **Construct Development**

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20 A construct operationalizing kindness was developed some time ago (Comunian, 1998) but  
21  
22 does not seem to have been widely adopted, with alternative operationalization being  
23  
24 proposed and explored (Canter *et al.*, op cit.) though as yet not validated. Rather than  
25  
26 adopting an existing construct the approach taken here was to identify the main themes  
27  
28 associated with kindness in the employment context that featured in the literature. This  
29  
30 identified four themes; kindness associated with an ethics of care; kindness as an  
31  
32 interpersonal trait within agreeableness; kindness as reflecting the expectation of reciprocal  
33  
34 gain; kindness as a concomitant of communitarian relations. Each of these themes in the  
35  
36 context of kindness among colleagues can be incorporated in a construct, and used to guide  
37  
38 research.  
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44 First, kindness is to be understood and studied among colleagues as an aspect of their  
45  
46 individual psychology, reflecting both state and trait (Colquitt et al 2013). That is kindness  
47  
48 may have antecedents in an individuals' state, or express an individual disposition which is  
49  
50 more stable, a trait. State and trait antecedents for kindness are present in the cooperative  
51  
52 tendencies in the 'big 5' factor model of personality (Barrick and Mount 1991) most evidently  
53  
54 and directly as part of the 'agreeableness' factor. The extent of agreeableness sought and  
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3 found in colleagues, as a trait or as a state, will create an environment with more or less  
4  
5 kindness in the workplace as a whole. These trait and state antecedents of kindness among  
6  
7 colleagues can be operationalized as Normative Kindness (NK). NK in any organization and  
8  
9 employment context will be skewed towards or away from states and traits favoring kindness  
10  
11 depending on who has been recruited and the types employed.  
12

13  
14  
15 Second, there are Social Exchange Theory (SET) considerations and explanations of kindness  
16  
17 among colleagues (Brief and Motowidlo , 1986). Kindness is influenced by people weighing  
18  
19 up the cost-benefits of performing an action in the employment context, including the  
20  
21 prospect and chances of reciprocation from the other party to the transaction (Fong, op cit. ).  
22  
23 If kindness ‘pays back’, and this is repeated, kindness will prevail (Raggio *et al.*, 2009).  
24  
25 These SET antecedents of kindness can be operationalized as Reciprocal Kindness (RK).  
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30 Third, kindness is defined and considered within the ethics of care, often related explicitly to  
31  
32 compassion (Held, 2006). The ethics of care and compassion have been defined with  
33  
34 reference to the characteristics attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness  
35  
36 (Miller *et al.*, op cit.). These characteristics can be potential antecedents of kindness among  
37  
38 colleagues. In organizations and employment with colleagues who have care and compassion  
39  
40 as a major or integral part of their role it would be expected that these antecedents would be  
41  
42 present, perhaps with guidance explicitly provided or implicit in the organization culture  
43  
44 (Tronto, 1994). Such antecedents may also exist in other organization and employment  
45  
46 contexts (Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2012) distinct from expectations of professional compassion  
47  
48 and care (Lilius *et al.*, 2008, Kanov *et al.*, 2017) and concerned more with typical and low  
49  
50 level transactions between colleagues. The antecedents of kindness here are those of  
51  
52 Conscientious Kindness (CK). CK would be expected to be more evident and present in some  
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3 kinds of organization and employment contexts more than others, with a strong presence in  
4  
5 caring profession workplaces and a weaker presence elsewhere.  
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9 Finally, the communitarian perspective conceives of kindness as being integral to  
10 membership of a community (Silva, 2011). Antecedents of kindness are an integral part of a  
11 supportive community, in which each contributes for the benefit of all (Fauchart *et al.*, 2011).  
12  
13 Kindness among colleagues in work would be present as and characterized by the extent of  
14 pro-social, extra-role, voluntary behavior. A pro-social disposition will be evident and overt  
15 behaviors in the form of helping, sharing, donating, cooperating and volunteering (Goetz *et*  
16 *al.*, op cit.). Kindness embodying pro-social behavior in work will be evidenced by  
17 discretionary behavior of a helping nature that goes beyond role requirements. These  
18 antecedents can be operationalized as Altruistic Kindness (AK). The extent to which a  
19 workplace is more or less like a community will determine the presence and extent of AK.  
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33 In sum, the construct development literature provides four potential antecedents of kindness  
34 among colleagues which may be present and active in the workplace;  
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- 39 • Normative Kindness (NK); antecedents in states/traits favouring agreeableness;
- 40 • Reciprocal Kindness (RK); antecedents in reciprocal and mutual gains;
- 41 • Conscientious Kindness (CK); antecedents in an ethics of care.
- 42 • Altruistic Kindness (AK); antecedents in community relations
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50 These are not meant to represent a hierarchy of antecedents, with NK as the base, leading up  
51 to AK as the peak and highest form. They are simply, and equally, potentially present and  
52 active antecedents of kindness among colleagues (see Figure 1). It might be expected that  
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3 kindness could be most present in organization and employment contexts with agreeable  
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5 people, reciprocity including kindness, a strong ethics of care, and where colleague relations  
6  
7 were community like. In contrasting contexts, where personality states and traits of  
8  
9 agreeableness not highly valued, acting kindly is not reciprocated, the ethics of care were not  
10  
11 active, and there was little or no community like relations, kindness would be absent; or, if  
12  
13 present, perceived as weak or deviant behavior among colleagues. Between these contrasting  
14  
15 and stark scenarios, a mix of various antecedents to various extents of kindness among  
16  
17 colleagues may be found, with kindness an appropriate and legitimate form of behavior  
18  
19 though one that might also be ambiguous or questioned.  
20

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24 Insert Figure 1 Here  
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27

## 28 **Method**

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33 The antecedents of kindness construct (NK- RK- AK-CK) was used to explore perceptions  
34  
35 and experiences of kindness among colleagues in an organization the researchers were  
36  
37 familiar with where kindness had emerged as a concern and access was possible; simply  
38  
39 based on some observations from experience the high value of kindness and its variable  
40  
41 presence had been noted. The organization was in the finance sector, a bank. This was a  
42  
43 reasonable environment to explore antecedents of kindness with, as it was known to be a  
44  
45 context in which a range of perceptions and experiences of kindness would exist. It is typical  
46  
47 in this regard, as banks tend to have well developed leadership development and explicit  
48  
49 culture and performance management which espouse agreeableness. They can have  
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51 workforces which are large, stable and with community-like aspects. At the same time they  
52  
53 have goals which mean colleagues are pursuing careers and livelihoods in a context that can  
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3 be seen as quite mercenary, archetypally so in some parts of the finance sector. The pressure  
4  
5 to get the job done can mean the environment becomes more 'dog-eat-dog'. There are  
6  
7 pressures to change to reduce costs and achieve optimal performance while dealing with  
8  
9 complex regulatory rules and new technology.  
10

### 11 Participants

12  
13 14 interviews in total were carried out. This is at the lower end of the range suggested as  
14  
15 appropriate for this kind of exploratory research. Interviewees were chosen based on  
16  
17 convenience sampling in this regional head office of the bank. Interviewees were selected  
18  
19 from among the management and professional tier, including Human Resource managers,  
20  
21 Line Managers and IT professionals. There was around 130 staff in this category. The sample  
22  
23 was chosen to include 7 women and 7 males, a gender balance broadly reflecting the  
24  
25 management and professional tier there. It was noticeable in two of the interviews, both with  
26  
27 women, that the theme of gender was highlighted as especially significant, but not raised in  
28  
29 the other 12 interviews. Cultural background was not specifically selected for, though it is  
30  
31 noteworthy that the sample includes Korean, Greek, Swiss, British, Middle Eastern,  
32  
33 Colombian, and Brazilian interviewees.  
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### 39 Instruments

40  
41 Semi-structured interviews were used. Three questions were identified and used to structure  
42  
43 an exploratory interview with interviewees;  
44

- 45 • What does Kindness mean to you?
  - 46 • How do you practice Kindness?
  - 47 • What do you think of Kindness in relation to this organization (the bank)?
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### 54 Procedures

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3 The interviews were recorded, with transcripts produced and input to NVIVO. The transcripts  
4  
5 of respondents' perceptions and experiences were coded with reference to the model of four  
6  
7 antecedents of kindness. Most interviews had a fair number of examples, covering individual  
8  
9 perceptions, team and organizational experiences. Some perceptions and experiences were  
10  
11 briefly mentioned, some were recounted in great depth. The briefest interview lasted 10  
12  
13 minutes and the more extensive over an hour. The perceptions and experiences could be  
14  
15 either positive that is showing of kindness among colleagues in one of the forms defined here.  
16  
17 Or they could be negative, describing the absence of kindness in a form that could be mapped  
18  
19 to the model used here; for example, selfishness, inconsideration, nastiness,  
20  
21 unprofessionalism. Some perceptions and experiences could be coded to one particular  
22  
23 antecedent; others were 'mixed', reflecting a blend and mix of more than one antecedent.  
24  
25 There are in total in the sample from the 14 interviews 454 examples of perception and  
26  
27 experience to code as representing an antecedent associated kindness. These range from 7  
28  
29 examples in one interview to 52 examples in another interview. Content analysis of these  
30  
31 coded perceptions and experiences is the focus of discussion in this paper. This is, of course,  
32  
33 only one way of approaching the interpretation of the data, as the weighting of perceptions  
34  
35 and experiences may matter too.  
36  
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## 41 **Results**

42  
43 Most interviewees had difficulty initially with defining kindness themselves at the outset,  
44  
45 though many were able to easily expand on their perceptions and experiences. These were  
46  
47 based on current and past work experience, but often extended to include childhood and  
48  
49 education and family experiences. Across all the interviews there was a combination of  
50  
51 various antecedents of kindness. There was no single antecedent of kindness which dominates  
52  
53 the sample as a whole (Table 1) or in each individual case and experience (Table 2). The  
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3 greatest number of perceptions and experiences of kindness discussed and coded were for  
4 Normative Kindness (NK) and Altruistic Kindness (AK). Both Conscientious Kindness (CK)  
5 and Reciprocal Kindness (RK) were also present in the sample, and most individuals, though  
6  
7  
8  
9 with less frequent mention.  
10

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14  
15 Insert Table 1 Here

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21 Insert Table 2 Here

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26 Of these for the sample as a whole two were more prominent overall, NK and AK. The other  
27 two RK and CK are present but less so. Only 8% of all perceptions and experiences captured  
28 here were coded as 'mixed', suggesting that the four antecedents can account for and be used  
29 to explain the majority of individual perceptions and experiences.  
30  
31  
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37 Table 2, showing individual interviewee profiles, has responses indicating that for those most strongly  
38 perceiving and experiencing NK they also perceived and experienced AK significantly. For those  
39 lower in perceiving and experiencing NK there is perceive and experience also CK with NK also  
40 prominent for many. In only one individual case is NK negligible, and in that case CK is prominent.  
41  
42  
43 The low presence for RK across all cases is an intriguing result, as this might be expected to be more  
44 prominent than it is. Whether this is a fair representation of perception and experience or an under-  
45 reporting of RK like perceptions and experiences is open to question. Some of the interviewee  
46 perceptions and experiences can be used to illustrate the presence of each antecedent; these  
47 are given below, starting with from the most frequently coded (NK) to least frequently coded  
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56 (CK).  
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5 Normative Kindness (NK), kindness that is perceived and experienced as reflecting a state or  
6  
7 trait, was evidenced in many forms; from buying coffee for other person when they were  
8  
9 feeling down, to speaking with a compassionate, sympathetic voice. Even as simple as;  
10

11  
12  
13 *“Saying hello to someone, acknowledging their presence”*  
14

15 NK was presented as instinctive and unconscious;  
16

17 *“I just do it because it's my personality, that I should help them out and do that”*  
18

19 *“When you feel sad about someone, depending on the relationship, you hug them”*  
20  
21

22 NK is often ‘in the moment’ and reflective of the state current at that moment or the traits  
23  
24 which emerge in the moment without conscious forethought;  
25

26 *“Say you see one of your colleagues looking down and they are not happy, so it's like*  
27  
28 *shall we go get a coffee, get you away from screen for a bit? That's just a gesture of*  
29  
30 *Kindness, they know that you know there is something up, you're not pressured but*  
31  
32 *you know they just need something, so you take them away even if they don't discuss*  
33  
34 *what's wrong with them you've at least dealt with them”*  
35  
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37  
38  
39 *“I think if you want to be kind you have to adapt yourself to counterpart and maybe*  
40  
41 *it's a person who likes to have clear statements not too complex sentences or stuff like*  
42  
43 *that, and you try then to adapt to fit the person's needs”*  
44  
45

46  
47  
48 The context can matter;  
49

50 *“It depends on stress levels, the more stressed I am, the less kind I am that's because*  
51  
52 *I'm tired and stressed and angry”*  
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3 *“By being honest with them, I find that that’s a big form of Kindness even if what you*  
4 *are telling people isn’t necessary what they want to hear. As the old adage goes, you*  
5 *can be cruel to be kind, so discreetly pointing, never in front of people, but discreetly*  
6 *pointing out that that could have been handled in different way”*  
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13 Altruistic Kindness (AK) was the next most frequently mentioned antecedent;  
14  
15  
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17

18 *“I don’t look around everything I’m doing everyday and note down what am doing, oh*  
19 *that’s nice thing to do D and pat myself on my back, I never think that way”*  
20  
21  
22  
23

24 AK is perceived and experienced where the relationship person is established, either in and  
25 out of working environment, with a feeling of being team-mates;  
26  
27  
28  
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30

31 *“I go out of my way especially for close friends and family. Close friends and family.”*  
32  
33  
34

35 *“I guess at work, you build up these friendships and they become more friends”*  
36  
37  
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40 Perceptions and experiences form about a genuine desire to want to help without any  
41 intention of gain, except perhaps the gain of self- appreciation from having the skill and  
42 resources to help;  
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48 *“I don’t think I’ve done anything unkind, I think it’s my general demeanor just to be*  
49 *nice to people rather than not”*  
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1  
2 Reciprocal Kindness (RK) is grounded in perception and experience of wanting to treat others  
3  
4 the way one wants to be treated. People will reciprocate, or if reciprocation is not  
5  
6 forthcoming kind acts stop.  
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10  
11 *“If someone asks me to do something for them I will do it if I have the time and I know if I*  
12 *ask them later for something they will do it”*  
13  
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16  
17  
18 The effort of kindness is weighed;  
19  
20

21  
22 *“I think sometimes right thing to do is easy so you just do it, sometimes right thing to do*  
23 *is difficult and you weigh up whether or not it’s worth the fight, in the office there will be*  
24 *right thing to do 3 different places 1. You think is there point doing it because no one*  
25 *listens, 2 It might piss someone off and it’s not worth the fight, 3. It might be difficult but*  
26 *it’s worth it at the end so that’s the one I will put energy in”*  
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35 Perceptions and experience of Conscientious Kindness (CK) were less frequent, but  
36  
37 potentially more weighted in their meaning and impact;  
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41  
42 *“I make a conscious effort to speak to someone with respect and as equal, not treating*  
43 *them as if they are inferior, I’ve seen a lot of people in power abuse their power in the*  
44 *way they behave and the humane aspect disappears”*  
45  
46  
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50  
51 *“I always act consciously at work with Kindness. For me Kindness is about giving*  
52 *recognition to someone for their work and making them feel they have added value. I*  
53 *learnt this on courses but also from my own experience where I liked it when I had*  
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3 *worked hard on a project and got great recognitions and feedback. I try to do the*  
4 *same for others, but of course there has to be a level of work that needs to be done*  
5 *before it gets recognition otherwise Kindness becomes a commodity and the effect*  
6 *wares off.”*

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12  
13 *“That’s like the guy I had to let go, I couldn’t do anything about it, I had to let the guy*  
14 *go but I was able to show compassion and able to try and say well I will help you get*  
15 *a job, get some references, I will look, I will keep my ears to the ground for any roles”*

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21  
22 CK can be perceived and experienced if understanding the other person’s needs and being  
23 able to appreciate the situation or person’s state in the mind before acting:

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25  
26  
27  
28 *“In any given situation you might not know going into it what the kindest thing or best*  
29 *thing to do is, but you’re constantly thinking well here is my opinion but is it best*  
30 *thing to do just that give that opinion unedited or should I soften it somewhat and tell*  
31 *this person, depending on the person and situation”*

## 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 **Discussion**

40  
41  
42  
43 The antecedents enable the nature and extent of kindness among colleagues in this study to be  
44 described and interpreted with relevance and value for individuals, teams and the organization  
45 (see Figure 2). This is showing that all the antecedents were present, perceived and  
46 experienced in various ways as kindness among colleagues, though two antecedents were  
47 more prominent in this case, as reported by individuals.

1  
2  
3 At the level of analysis of the individual any person can be described with reference to the  
4  
5 various antecedents, and as a colleague would be able to compare themselves with the  
6  
7 kindness profiles of others and the organization as a whole. For example, her most could see  
8  
9 they were high in NK and AK. With others there might be expected to be some issues for the  
10  
11 few individuals showing as more RK and CK oriented. It may be that a few people with this  
12  
13 profile are important and they fit in particular roles well (human resources or some  
14  
15 management posts). It may be that not conforming to the dominant pattern creates discomfort  
16  
17 and challenge. NK expectations and effects may become more significant as tenure of service  
18  
19 increases. A premise of NK is that affect is felt if an individual has experienced a state which  
20  
21 allows them to understand others in a similar context. As length of time in an organization  
22  
23 increases, individuals gain more experience in terms of observing and partaking in  
24  
25 organizational life and confidence to think, feel and behave in kindly ways. An alternative  
26  
27 explanation is that with increasing length of time in an organization, employees may  
28  
29 experience a renewal of CK, the intrinsic standards of moral obligation and orientation once  
30  
31 the need to compete to establish themselves is not as predominant.  
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39 From this study in itself it is not possible to draw any strong conclusions about groups and  
40  
41 the organization, but there is some scope for exploring the extent to which the construct is  
42  
43 capable of being useful at these levels of analysis too.  
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50 At the group level it would be expected that kindness might be a boundary of difference. This  
51  
52 study cannot be systematic, though there are indications from the interviewee cases. One  
53  
54 interviewee stated that her experience within the organization had led her to change; in the  
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3 terms used here to become more RK due to negative experiences from AK motivated  
4  
5 behavior being taken advantage of. Where length of service increased people seem not to  
6  
7 become less kind but may become more RK in how they think and behave. For example, AK  
8  
9 perceptions and experiences seem to prevail among younger professionals and those with  
10  
11 shorter length of service in an organization. Having come out of a community, home and  
12  
13 education context younger professionals may profile for AK strongly because they label their  
14  
15 peers as “friends” early in relationships and trust is given more readily. They may want to  
16  
17 establish themselves, so are more committed where they desire to identify with the  
18  
19 organization and behave with “citizenship”.  
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24  
25 RK expectations and effects may appear most strongly at management and professional levels,  
26  
27 particularly among team leads, line managers and middle managers. Managers perceive and  
28  
29 experience with an RK filter, kindness mutual and conditional. There is a risk that managers  
30  
31 perceived and experienced as RK may appear to some as if they are behaving with an absence  
32  
33 of the NK, or AK, or CK that is expected in the organization as a whole. This reliance on RK  
34  
35 and perceived absence of NK/AK/CK among managers may be potentially problematic.  
36

37  
38 This study suggests a profile at the organization level, aggregating the individual perceptions  
39  
40 and experiences, of an organization which has high NK-AK and lower but with RK-CK also  
41  
42 present. This seems to be a fair and reasonable overview of what would be expected in a bank,  
43  
44 based on a study of perceptions and experiences among the management and professional tier.  
45  
46 Agreeable people, seeking to sustain healthy groups, while achieving specific goals requiring  
47  
48 trade-offs, with some emphasizing a strong ethical commitment to kindness. This profile  
49  
50 could represent fair expectations, about the way the bank prefers to be with kindness among  
51  
52 colleagues. Or it could indicate where levers of change might be if expectations for kindness  
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3 among colleagues were to be a focus of change. Threats, things which might inhibit or  
4  
5 undermine kindness, could also be understood with reference to the profile.  
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## 9 **Conclusions**

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12  
13 ‘Kindness Among colleagues’ was identified a specific context for the scientific study of  
14  
15 kindness. The gaps identified in this have been addressed by this study to some extent, though  
16  
17 with evident limitations to generalization. The study does adopt an employment context  
18  
19 appropriate construct of kindness, generating and considering evidence in a direct study  
20  
21 among colleagues. It is though limited to one organization and a small sample. The data is  
22  
23 presented and evaluated rigorously neither as advocating kindness nor critiquing it in the  
24  
25 employment context.  
26  
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30  
31 The conclusion is that there is validity for the antecedents of kindness construct described and  
32  
33 adopted for the study. Further development is necessary, and of value; the development of  
34  
35 indicators for the construct and development of an instrument to use with survey methods  
36  
37 across a variety of organizations. It is also important that these address aspects of the group  
38  
39 and organization levels, as well as exploring individual perceptions and experiences.  
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44 The generalizability is limited, even if the gaps in researching kindness among colleagues  
45  
46 have been addressed to a good extent. There is scope and need for a more developed and  
47  
48 validated construct to provide better scientifically grounded knowledge about kindness in the  
49  
50 workplace context, and its association with desirable outcomes in changing work  
51  
52 organizations and their effective management. Understanding kindness scientifically is not a  
53  
54 solution to the real challenges in work and employment which extensive related interest in  
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1  
2 studies of trust, altruism and compassion have addressed. But it may be a useful ‘goldilocks’  
3  
4 construct in management and organization research, as kindness is neither too big nor too  
5  
6 little to be useful, it might be ‘just right’ as a focus for exploring across individuals, teams and  
7  
8 organizations as a whole. This may help colleagues, managers and employees, to be self-  
9  
10 aware of aspects of their organization culture, leadership and behavior, in a helpful and  
11  
12 nuanced way. While refraining from advocating any specific antecedent of kindness in and of  
13  
14 itself, there is enough in this study to suggest that if the claims made in the name of kindness  
15  
16 are fair and reasonable, a scientific contribution may be of some help, use and impact.  
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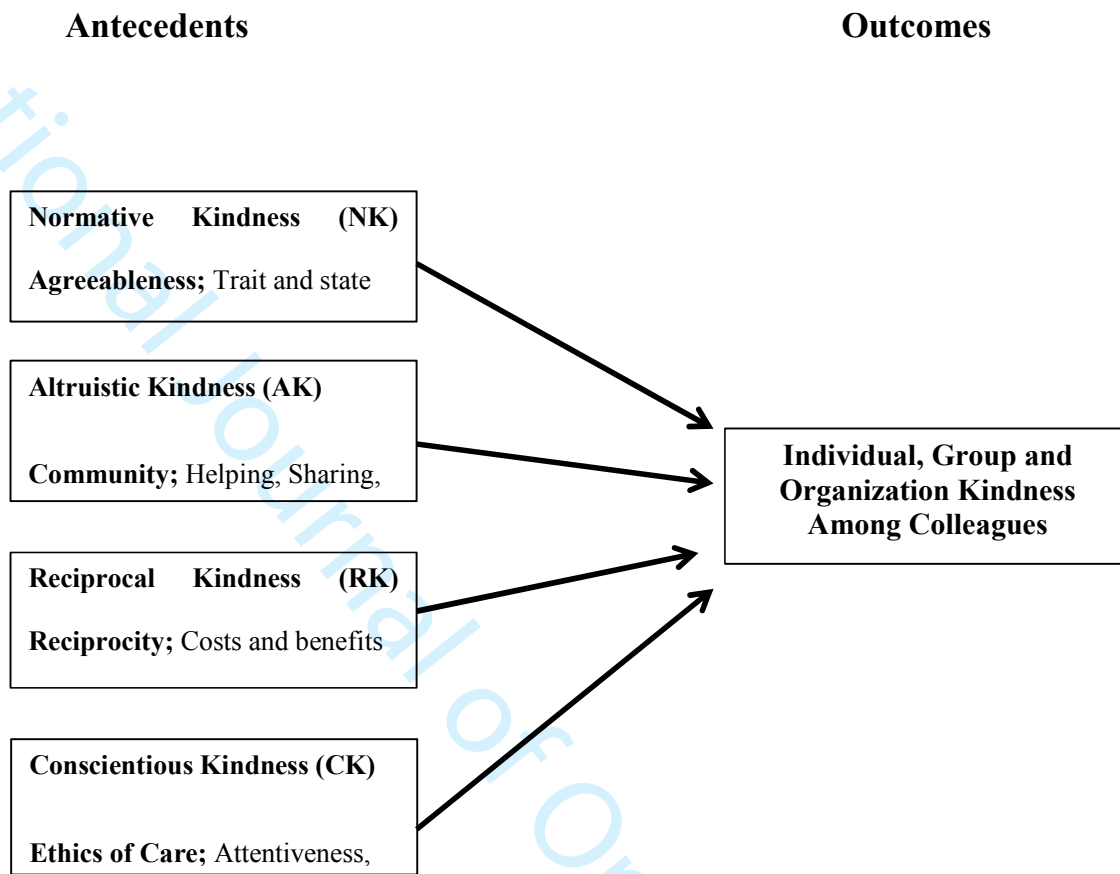
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**Figure 1; Conceptual map for research using Antecedents, and Outcomes for Kindness Among Colleagues**

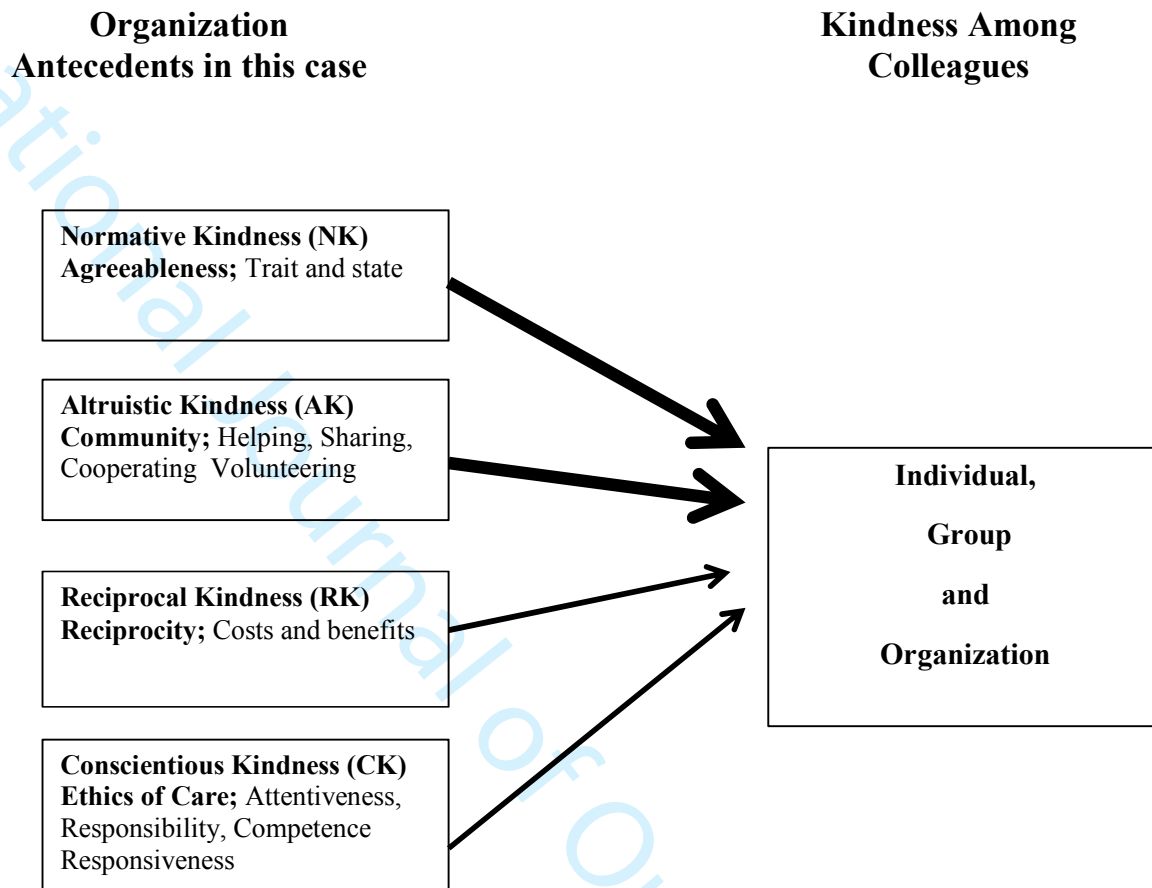
	<b>Normative Kindness NK %</b>	<b>Altruistic Kindness AK %</b>	<b>Reciprocal Kindness RK %</b>	<b>Conscientious Kindness CK %</b>	<b>Mixed %</b>
<b>% of all mentions</b>	31	24	13	15	8

**Table 1; Antecedents as a % of all mentions in perception and experience of kindness among colleagues for the sample**

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Interviewees	Normative Kindness NK %	Altruistic Kindness AK %	Reciprocal Kindness RK %	Conscientious Kindness CK %	Mixed %
1	71	29	0	0	0
2	50	22	16	0	13
3	46	16	19	7	12
4	42	21	21	13	3
5	42	29	8	17	4
6	33	22	17	14	14
6	30	22	7	37	4
8	29	43	14	10	5
9	27	33	0	27	13
10	26	15	26	21	13
11	23	23	15	35	4
12	22	33	8	10	7
13	21	34	8	24	13
14	8	42	17	33	0
<b>Mean</b>	31	24	13	15	8

**Table 2; Kindness antecedents; proportions of each antecedent by interviewee**



33 **Figure 2; Weighting of Antecedents of Kindness Among Colleagues in the Research**  
34 **Case**

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