

ESTHER SACKETT

RESEARCH STATEMENT

My scholarly interest in collaborative processes stems from years of professional experience managing interdisciplinary teams and projects in the healthcare and non-profit industries. In modern organizations, people frequently work across multiple teams and even multiple organizations, and often depend on others who have different functional backgrounds, priorities, or resources. These features complicate the processes through which people collaborate, since it is not always clear what interdependencies exist within and across teams, how goals align (or not), and how expertise is best integrated. At its heart, my research addresses the question: How can people best navigate their diverse goals, characteristics, and perceptions to collaborate effectively?

Broadly, my work draws from the disciplines of management and social psychology to investigate the intersection of collaboration, motivation, and interpersonal perception within and across teams, and I use a variety of methodological and analytical approaches in my research, including qualitative methods, surveys, experiments, and social network analysis. Since joining SCU in 2019, I have published four peer-reviewed articles (two in top-tier journals) as well as one article in *Harvard Business Review*, a highly impactful practitioner outlet. In addition, I have a strong research pipeline that includes three papers currently under review (including two revise and resubmits), two more papers that I plan to submit later this year, and two projects for which I am currently collecting and analyzing data.

I see my research as contributing *primarily* to three literatures: Goal Alignment and Motivation in Teams, Team Cognition, and Interpersonal Perceptions. While my work spans many contexts (healthcare, entrepreneurship, multinational corporations, and non-profits), and certain papers contribute directly to additional literatures (e.g., team formation, team composition, organizational change, interorganizational collaboration), all of my research connects to those three primary literatures in some way, and that is how I see my work – as a whole – making a cohesive contribution. In the paragraphs that follow, I summarize how my research fits together.

1. Goal Alignment and Motivation in Teams

Whereas most of the existing literature on goal pursuit in teams focuses on single teams with a limited set of shared goals, a central argument of my work is that the goals of any one team should be viewed as being embedded in a broader *team goal system* that includes not only the goals of the team, but also the goals each member pursues outside of the team. Without considering the broader goal system, teams are likely to misdiagnose the source of misalignments they may experience, and fail to identify synergies across teams. To this end, some of my earlier work on this topic, published in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, explores the idea that goal pursuit is a social process (Fitzsimons, Sackett, & Finkel, 2016). This paper integrates theory on interpersonal goal pursuit from social psychology with literatures on teamwork and leadership to offer practical applications and has been cited widely in both management and psychology journals. In newer work (Sackett, Awtrey & Cronin, under review at *Group and Organization Management*), my coauthors and I build further on these ideas to

enrich the conceptualization of goal alignment in teams to consider how specific configurations of goal sharedness and goal compatibility impact team processes. Both papers use novel approaches to conceptualize the structure of goal alignment in teams, with implications for team coordination, conflict management, and team selection.

In two related papers, I explore how team members develop an *awareness* of goal system alignment and the impact of that awareness at the individual and team levels of analysis: 1) an experimental study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* (Sackett & Fitzsimons, 2021); 2) a qualitative field study of voluntary project teams (Sackett, in progress). Together, these two papers begin to unpack the complicated processes that underlie how team members come to understand how their goals fit together, and the consequences of that awareness on coordination and interpersonal processes. In addition, my article published in *Organization Studies* (Nigam, Sackett, & Golden, 2022) emphasizes the role that *external parties* can play in facilitating goal alignment among diverse stakeholders during the organizational change process as a result of their unique social position and the way they manage their role expectations.

My ongoing research focuses on contexts in which clear goal hierarchies across collaborators' multiple goals may be more obscured than in traditional teams, which can make the process of identifying and goal (mis)alignment even more challenging. This includes interorganizational collaboration (Sackett & Mayo, under 2nd review at *Health Care Management Review*), new venture teams (Sackett, Gray, & Howell, invited for 2nd R&R at *Group and Organization Management*), multiple team membership structures (Sackett, Awtrey, & Cronin, under review at *Group and Organization Management*), voluntary work arrangements (Sackett, in progress), and platform labor (Cho et al., in progress). A better understanding of how team members navigate the pursuit of their multiple goals in complex collaborative contexts will ultimately enable managers and members of self-managed teams to better diagnose and remediate their misalignments, and to improve team selection.

2. Team Cognition

The extent to which team members are “on the same page” about key information (e.g., goals, distributed expertise) can drastically impact team processes and performance. Whereas most of the research on team cognition has focused on bounded teams with stable membership, my work expands the boundaries of team cognitive constructs such as transactive memory systems (TMS) and team mental models (TMM). In two projects – one in the healthcare industry (Sackett & Mayo, under 2nd review at *Health Care Management Review*) and another in the mobile technology industry (Pearce & Sackett, in progress) – my coauthors and I use multiple methods to investigate TMS in interorganizational alliances where team membership is more fluid. Beyond the expansion of level of analysis, the inclusion of qualitative data in both of these mixed-methods studies brings a richness to the literature on TMS that has typically been studied experimentally or with survey-based measures. This has enabled my coauthors and I to unpack the role of personal relationships in developing and maintaining interorganizational TMS.

My several papers on goal alignment, discussed earlier, also connect to the idea of expanding the boundaries of team cognition in their emphasis on the role of team goal system awareness. Rather than traditional team mental models that focus on shared team goals, my work

(Fitzsimons et al., 2016, Sackett & Fitzsimons, 2021; Sackett et al., under review, Sackett et al., in progress) also includes “extra-team goals” and underscores that, unlike traditional team mental models where more shared awareness is better, the benefits of disclosing extra-team goals appears to be contingent on the extent to which others anticipate goal conflict. In my future work, I plan to continue to study these contingencies.

3. Interpersonal Perceptions

It has been well established that people see themselves differently than the way they see others, and this can impact the extent to which team members subsequently differ in their experience of their interactions with one another. In my work, I examine the consequences of some of these differences on team outcomes as well as some of the mechanisms behind those differences, drawing on psychological theories on interpersonal perceptual and construal level and applying them to team contexts. For example, in my article published in *Group Dynamics: Research, Theory and Practice* (Sackett & Cummings, 2018), my coauthor and I use a field sample of over 300 teams to demonstrate the negative effects of interdependence centrality asymmetry. This work uses a social network approach to measure perceived task interdependence in teams, and highlights that team members’ experience of how interdependent they are with one another can vary, causing coordination problems. In my article published in *Organization Science* (Gray et al., 2024), my coauthors and I demonstrate – through two field studies and an experiment – that there are cognitive and motivational differences between lead entrepreneurs and cofounders that cause them to approach the team formation process differently, complicating the formation of beneficial “hybrid” ties (people who possess both resource complementarity and interpersonal compatibility). Our practitioner-oriented article in *Harvard Business Review* (Howell, Gray, & Sackett, 2024), based on this research, emphasizes practical tips for entrepreneurs to overcome these hurdles. And, in some of my ongoing research, (Kapadia, Sackett & Jones, in progress), my coauthors and I investigate asymmetric perceptions of multitasking behaviors, demonstrating that although people perceive their own multitasking positively, observing others’ multitasking lowers creativity ratings. Together, my work in this stream integrates research from multiple literatures to examine the mechanisms through which interpersonal perceptions impact teamwork.

4. Summary

While at SCU, my research has been published in top peer-reviewed journals (*Organization Science* and *Organization Studies*, both considered A publications by our departmental standards) as well as in well-regarded field journals (*Frontiers in Psychology*, a B by our departmental standards) and influential practitioner outlets (*Harvard Business Review*). I also have three papers in the review process at well-regarded field journals (*Group and Organization Management* and *Health Care Management Review*). And, I have four other projects in progress, one of which will be submitted to a special issue of *Organization Science* in July, and two of which have been accepted for presentation at conferences this summer. Building on my publication record prior to arriving at SCU, my work demonstrates sustained engagement of impactful research and a trajectory of continued future research productivity.