

**WILL THEY STAY? EXPLORING MISSION ATTACHMENT AND
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AMONG
EMPLOYEES IN A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION**

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Capella University

September 2011

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to explore how employees described their commitment to the organization and attachment to the mission in relation to their intent to stay. Hiring for mission has been loosely used in some organizations to attract prospective candidates who believe in the organization's values and mission and want to remain there to achieve those goals. At the same time, current literature emphasizes that employees' level of commitment determines their expectations and their willingness to remain with the organization. This study explored organizational commitment and mission attachment in a qualitative form through formulating open-ended, semi-structured questions capturing participants' level of affective, continuance, and normative commitment adapted from The Organizational Commitment Scale by Allen and Meyers (1990) and open-ended, semi-structured questions adapted from Mission Attachment statements by Brown and Yoshioka (2003) which determined their awareness and understanding of the mission. Participants from a Southeast U.S.-based nonprofit company answered ten interview questions which addressed their personal experiences and feelings about their understanding and attachment to the mission and their commitment to the organization in relation to their intent to stay. Through various emerging themes, participants expressed a knowledge and attachment of the mission through their personal understanding of the mission and through the work they performed. The majority of participants were attached to the mission more so than the organization itself. Through the use of advocating for policy changes and other legislative changes, employees understood how this component supported the mission in saving and improving people lives. The emotional attachment to the mission came

through the way they knew the work they performed touched the lives of their family, friends, co-workers, and others. Their intent to remain connected to the mission goals remained strong even through volunteer services if they left the organization. Their commitment to the organization varied based upon areas relating to financial and cost impact, cultural changes, and work related factors. Recommendations for future studies include using a larger diverse sampling of nonprofit employees and extending this study to for-profit companies to explore other implications that can possibly affect employee behavior and job retention.

Dedication

I must first dedicate this accomplishment to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because without His Grace and Mercy, I would not have made it this far. He is the one from whom my Blessings flow.

I also dedicate this accomplishment to my children, Perry Collins, Victoria Collins, and my grandson Demarri Johnson. They never allowed me to think that I could not finish this dissertation. My daughter nursed me through my illnesses, hugged me when I had bad days, and prayed for me when I thought I could no longer pray for myself. Although my son was far away, his comforting encouragement through telephone calls let me know that I could do this. My grandson whose smiles and hugs were so infectious gave me the inspiration to know that I needed to leave this as a legacy for him.

To my family, I appreciated all the love and support that you gave me. I want to especially send love to my baby sister for her extra comfort, love, and prayers.

To my parents who are now with the Lord, I would like to dedicate this labor of love in honor of you. Your lingering love and memories reminded me of your words, “Anything is possible through Christ who strengthens us”. I know your presence have been with me along this journey. I miss you, and I love you!

Acknowledgments

There are so many people to thank who have been a part of my journey. I want them to know that their prayers and kind words were so comforting when I thought I would never make it. I also want to thank those who were involved in allowing me to perform my study at their organization. However, I would like to thank the ones who have provided the most guidance and insights through this trial.

First, I would like to acknowledge my committee, Dr. April Boyington Wall, Dr. Maurice Ahyee, and Robert Bigelow J.D. This group provided me with support, advice, and guidance. I would especially like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Wall for her support and guidance through this journey. Dr. Wall helped me not only through the academic part of this journey but also the spiritual part that one endures when taking on a project such as this dissertation. She pushed me to a level which helped to strengthen and fine tune my own capabilities. I thank you! Also, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Laura Hutt. She stayed with me every step of the way.

Next, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Outten who listened to my concerns and gave me advice that allowed me the courage and stamina to keep going when I thought I was at the end of my rope. You definitely helped me grow through this experience.

Last but definitely not least, I have to acknowledge my good friend Dr. Calvin Thompson. He was my rock. Dr. Thompson was there when I was ill and could not think about continuing to write. He helped me understand that finishing this dissertation is not a race. It does not matter how fast you finish, but that you finish. He constantly lifted me up in prayer for my health and my strength to continue my journey. Thank you!

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

Americans live in an age of nonprofit organizations involved in numerous fields, such as human services, education, religion, arts, and philanthropy (Berry, 2005). In the last 25 years, the total number of nonprofits registered with the IRS has increased almost three-fold from 300,000 to around 800,000. Nonprofits have more than surpassed the growth of for-profit firms (Gose, 2005).

One in 10 Americans either works full-time or part-time for approximately 1.1 million nonprofit organizations in the U.S. (Ayers-Williams, 1998). In 2004, nonprofits were responsible for more than six percent of the U.S. gross domestic products and services, and they employed approximately 12.5 million Americans (Moore, 2004). The continued growth of nonprofits shows the attraction that many Americans have for becoming members of, or affiliating themselves with organizations whose mission is to serve social and economic causes that are crucial to underserved populations.

Much nonprofit literature presented over the years has acknowledged the importance and growing needs of nonprofit organizations and their relationship to public awareness (Alexander, 1999; Hammack, 2002; Weisbrod, 1999). The provision of services to others is important to the social and civil life of many Americans. Drucker (2001a) posited, “Everyone is an organ of society and exists for the sake of society” (p. 16). We all need one another to live in a society that plays a humanitarian role in how we live life to its fullest. The tireless efforts of nonprofit organizations attempt to fill this necessary void.

Nonprofits, more than for-profit firms, are the voice within the political system that represents the poor and disadvantaged in society (Berry, 2005). Self-governing nonprofit organizations deliver various services through sometimes under funded or controlled means to support a mission whose business focus is on saving or changing lives (Hammack, 2002). Santora, Seaton and Sarros (1999) contend, “The decrease in funding from traditional revenue streams, coupled with intensely competitive markets, have taken their toll and often paint a gloomy picture for many nonprofit organization” (p. 101).

To capture the spirit and emotional movement of their mission, organizations define and construct a brief document known as a *mission statement*. The mission statement should project a clear declaration of purpose for the organization (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003). A well-designed mission statement reflects the spirit of the organization; however, the mission should be more than a statement or symbol displayed on the walls of an institution. Accordingly, the mission statement can inspire employees and help them focus on the overall strategic direction of the organization.

The foundation of nonprofit organizations is deeply rooted in the strength of their mission and values (Glasrud, 2001). Organizations are able to articulate their overall purpose and role through their mission and the work they do to achieve these goals (Bart & Tabone, 1988). In addition, nonprofit authors concur that nonprofit organizations are different in that their mission is incorporated in the organization’s accountability and public trust which sets them apart from other sectors (Jeavons, 1994).

Nonprofit organizations are mission driven, and due to emotional attachment to the mission, people are usually drawn to these organizations (Kim & Less, 2007). Since

the mid-1980s, organizations have used their missions as recruiting tools to attract employees who identify with their purpose and values and commit themselves to achieving the organization's vision of the future (Harrison, 1987). Using the organization's mission as a recruiting tool can increase the probability of retaining valuable employees and decrease the rate of employee turnover.

Any organization, for-profit or nonprofit, needs a quality pool of highly skilled employees. Nonprofit organizations have a significant need to attract highly qualified employees to run a multitude of social programs with limited funding and human resources. A major challenge that faces nonprofits is attracting and retaining employees whose compensation and benefits might not be competitive with those of employees of many for-profit firms (Carlton & Yoshioka, 2003). Usually, the employees with nonprofits need to have a commitment that can be described as beyond one self and focused on the needs of others (Akingbola, 2006; Armstrong, 1992).

Accordingly, the theory of organizational commitment has been conceptualized as a means to understand employees and their ties to an organization. Allen & Meyer (1990) described organizational commitment as a psychological state that attempts to understand employees' relationship with the organization and the choices that affect their decisions to stay or leave. Although other variables can shape one's commitment level, each employee has a "psychological contract" tying them to their individualized expectations from the organization in return for their given talents (Rousseau & Parks, 1993).

Because employees relate to the mission in different ways, the need to understand this attachment on a psychological level aids hiring managers in determining whether a

job applicant has a focus on the mission. In addition, understanding the impact of mission attachment and the various psychological levels of organizational commitment can assist human resources professionals in understanding what is needed to retain their most valuable resource, human capital.

Background of the Study

Nonprofit organizations are created to implement social programs that provide needed benefits to the public (Berry, 2005). In addition, the activities of the nonprofits affect other aspects of American society, including volunteerism (Goulet and Frank, 2002). None of the programs or services can survive without the support of volunteers and paid staff members.

Employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities are needed to support social programs; however, nonprofit organizations face many challenges when attempting to recruit and retain employees who are committed to their mission and values. Individuals' job expectations and their motivations for employment are usually unknown to the hiring organization. Mayer (1978) points out:

Although an applicant comes in for an interview having identified those specific needs and expectations she wants satisfied ... neither the interviewer nor the interviewee discusses the real motivators of the interviewee, nor the true concerns of the organization simply because the present system does not espouse this open dialogue. (p. 262)

A redesign of the recruitment and interviewing process to include a discussion of the mission would allow the organization to determine job applicants' expectations relative to their propensity to support the organization's mission and values.

Competition for qualified talent prevails among companies, industries, organizations, and government bodies. Studies show that a finite number of qualified

individuals exist, and that competition for this limited pool will intensify (Bhattacharya, Sen & Korschum, 2008). Understanding what attracts and keeps employees in the organization can provide the competitive advantage needed for nonprofit organizations to obtain highly qualified individuals. If nonprofit organizations cannot provide innovative methods for recruitment and retention, they will lose talented employees to for-profit organizations or other business sectors (Christoforo & Williams, 2002).

Most employees desire work that is purposeful and enjoyable and relates to values similar to their own (Campbell, 1992). When agreeing to work for a company, employees assume that it will grow and provide them the opportunity to advance (Kontoghiorghes & Bryant, 2004). Since employees ultimately engage in a psychological contract between themselves and the organization, they want to know how their talents will be utilized within the organization and what they will receive in return for freely providing their services.

Employee loyalty and commitment are no longer guaranteed in an employee-employer relationship. Nonprofit employees are considered the most important asset to their organizations (Barbeito & Bowman, 1998). To attract and retain, the organization must discover ways to “engage employees so that their hearts, minds, and souls are committed to the goals of the organization” (Ulrich, 1997, p. 193). Since nonprofit organizations cannot offer higher wages and better benefits than most for-profits, they must capitalize on the emotional connection that brought employees to them and, hopefully, will guarantee their long-term commitment to the organization’s mission. Therefore, it is imperative that nonprofit organizations engage in active research to

understand what will be critical in order for them to be successful and competitive in the labor market (Stubbs, 1998).

Additionally, the nonprofit's mission reflects the "heart" of the organization (Drucker, 2001b). The mission statement communicates the organization's "soul," which allows employees to understand important aspects of the organization, such as "who are we, what do we do, and where are we headed" (Helms & Frazee, 1994, p.46). The mission statement can be the motivational tool to reaffirm employees' commitment to a nonprofit's organizational purpose (Forehand, 2000). In addition, this tool can direct and invigorate not only the organization's staff, but also its volunteers, helping them focus on areas to prepare the organization to meet future goals (Glasrud, 2001).

When nonprofit organizations understand how employees relate to the mission, they can better understand what level of organizational commitment influences an employee's decision to remain with the organization. If the mission is substantiated through a harmonious workplace system, employees will fully commit themselves to the overall goals of the mission (McManus, 2000). When employees "buy into" the mission, they have a strong sense of identity and are dedicated to the principles making them more likely to stay (Bart, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

It is not known how an organization's mission impacts employee commitment in a nonprofit institution. There is a need to understand this connection to the mission and the level of commitment from employees to gain a stronger alignment between the organization and its people. Social scientists seek to understand how organizational commitment can have some bearing on employees' decisions to maintain loyalty within

the organization (Rotolo & Wilson, 2006). Nonprofit organizations more than any other sector have expressed great interest in discovering the key to retaining highly qualified employees to fulfill mission initiatives and meet organizational goals (Glasrud, 2001). A survey conducted from 2005 to the end of 2006 showed that nonprofit organizations lost nearly 30% of their employee base in that time period (Somaya & Williamson 2008). Such turnover creates additional expenses relating to recruiting, hiring, and retraining new employees. Strategic retention practices can encourage committed employees to stay and help the organization become financially secure and keep its mission in focus (Fairhurst, Jordan & Neuwirth, 1997).

In an unstable economy and facing the constant need to re-evaluate financial resources, human resources professionals have a heightened need to study ways to retain talented individuals. To address the concerns of employee retention, organizational focus within nonprofits must focus on understanding employees' attachment to the mission and how various levels of organizational commitment can have an effect on their decision to stay.

Purpose of the Study

Many nonprofit organizations use their mission statement to guide organizational decision making and to attract employees who share the same values (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003). In general, employees who express positive attitudes and attachment toward the organization's mission show greater satisfaction as permanent members of the organization (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003). The purpose of this study is to understand how employees in an affiliate nonprofit Southeast U.S.-based organization describe their

attachment to the mission and their organizational commitment in relation to their intent to remain with the organization.

The mission of a nonprofit organization defines services to be performed that benefit society, the community, or other global causes (Campbell, 1992; Bart, 1999). Members of this nonprofit organization must carry the voice and soul of the mission into the political arena so that they influence politicians and other government officials to lobby for needed funding to support social changes that can fulfill the organization's mission. The desire and need to retain these highly qualified, committed employees to balance mission needs and political influence is a primary concern to the organization. The qualitative data that will be gathered from the study will allow the researcher to explore mission attachment and organizational commitment and their effects on employee decisions to remain with the organization.

Additionally, the study will utilize Allen and Meyer's (1990) Organizational Commitment Scale, because of its importance in understanding the levels of organizational commitment. Data collection from studies using Allen and Meyer's (1990) Organizational Commitment Scales was originally derived by using a quantitative seven-point Likert scale instrument. Qualitative data proposed for this study will be gathered from open-ended semi-structured interview questions adapted from the statements used in the Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitment Scales. Utilizing an interview approach will allow participants the opportunity to provide verbal responses which can convey more accurate emotions and experiences. The proposed question to be answered is as follows:

How do employees describe their commitment to their organization and attachment to the mission in relationship to their intent to stay?

Rationale

Implementing an organization's best practices and understanding employees' commitment within a nonprofit organization can provide stability in a labor market where for-profit firms are formidable competitors. It is no secret that nonprofit organizations often struggle to recruit and retain highly qualified employees (Ban, Drahnak-Faller & Towers, 2003). Many nonprofit employees are often paid less than their counterparts in for-profit firms, whose education and experiences are very similar to their own (Ban, Drahnak-Faller & Towers, 2003; Emanuele & Higgins, 2000). Unfortunately, due to funding restrictions, many nonprofit organizations are not financially equipped to offer employees more generous fringe benefits that are often found in for-profit companies (Anderson & Pulich, 2000; Ban, Drahnak-Faller & Towers, 2003; Emanuele & Higgins, 2000; Karl & Sutton, 1998).

Studies have found that employees who exhibit high commitment are far less likely to leave an organization than are employees who are not committed (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974; Angle and Perry, 1981). Recruiting and retaining high-performing employees is significant to the success of an organization. Committed employees tend to make positive contributions to an organization and are usually satisfied (Addae, Parboteeach & Davis, 2006).

Organizations can generate high levels of commitment from employees by having a clear mission and values that every employee supports (George, 1999). Nonprofit employees tend to be passionate about the organization's mission and want to accomplish

it (Kim & Lee, 2003). A greater understanding of the mission and the level of commitment among nonprofit employees can increase employee retention. Strong correlations between nonprofit employees' emotional attachment to an institution's mission and their level of commitment can play a significant role in retention. Kim and Lee (2003) and Light (2002a) contend that "mission attachment has been neglected as a factor in nonprofit employee retention, although studies have reported the importance of mission attachment as a valuable tool for attracting and retaining nonprofit employees given the 'doing more with less' environment" (p. 228).

Significance of the Study

Retention of staff is more critical at the management levels than at the non-management levels (Somaya & Williamson, 2008). Low pay, lack of resources, and job pressures can cause nonprofit workers in lower job grades to seek employment in other sectors (Mirvis and Hackett, 1986). Although employees in nonprofit organizations gain satisfaction from working toward the mission, this does not mean they are completely committed to the organization and will remain as employees (Ban, Drahnak-Faller & Towers, 2003; Mirvis & Hackett, 1986).

Nonprofit leaders and HR professionals should be concerned with the retention level of management and non-management staff due to the high administrative cost and human capital loss that can occur with consistent turnover. Turnover in skilled workers with operational knowledge leads to substantial losses in knowledge and can cripple an organization (Somaya & Williamson, 2008). In addition, some experts have estimated this cost to equate to 150% of annual employee compensation (Somaya & Williamson,

2008). Mor Barak, Nissly and Levin (2001) attributed most of this turnover to limited organizational commitment from the employees.

Organizational commitment is a crucial aspect in the employment relationship (Mohamed, Taylor & Hassan, 2006). An understanding of mission attachment and organizational commitment helps to identify which employees believe in the mission and for what reasons they choose to stay with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990, 1996). Allen and Meyer's work provides a basic understanding of employees' feelings for, and identification with, the organization (Delobbe and Vandenberghe, 2000).

Challenges continue to exist in for-profit and nonprofit organizations in attracting and retaining employees who are dedicated and committed to achieving organizational goals. The results of this study will be useful to nonprofits' leaders and human resources professionals by demonstrating the importance of their mission in an employee's decision to join or leave the organization. The mission statement should be a marketing tool clearly communicated so that employees can identify with the values, initiatives, and organizational goals. This knowledge will further equip leaders to understand organizational commitment and how to use their mission statement as a tool to recruit and retain qualified talent.

This qualitative study explored mission attachment and organizational commitment in a nonprofit organization. The information in this study will assist nonprofit leaders and human resources professionals in designing programs and organizational strategies to retain employees more effectively while gauging their focus on attachment to the mission. No matter what decision(s) brought employees to nonprofit

organizations, continued research is required to determine the factors needed to retain these employees after they have made a commitment to join an organization.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of organizational commitment contends that employees are committed to an organization, but at different psychological levels (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Each employee exhibits different levels of interest in committing to a particular organization. Mowday (1998) believes that the emergence of studies examining organizational commitment is a result of the benefits of gaining a better understanding of employee performance and job turnovers. According to Allen and Meyer (1990), the theory behind organizational commitment essentially concerns the way in which individuals bond with other people and organizations.

Further research conducted by Allen and Meyer (1990) defined the level of commitment by suggesting that there are three dimensions or levels of commitment that can have an effect on whether employees choose to stay with an organization. The nature of these relationships depends on what dimensions of commitment the employee is seeking. Allen and Meyer's (1990) Organizational Commitment Scale explored these aspects: (1) affective commitment (refers to the need for employees to be engaged with the organization through emotional connections); (2) continuance commitment (refers to the cost impact of leaving the organization); and (3) normative commitment (refers to obligations the employees feel that ties them to the organization). Additionally, Allen and Meyer (1990) propose that individuals who have a desire to join the organization (affective commitment) are the ones who will go the extra mile to meet organizational

goals, rather than employees who are there based upon continuance or normative commitment.

This research explored commitment founded on the Three Component Model originated by Allen and Meyer (1990). Specifically, the research utilized the three components— affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment—to determine what led employees to remain with an organization. The model embraced the theory that linked the relationship between the psychological state of the employee and the organization.

Psychological commitment is another construct consistently mentioned in most literature indicating the driver influencing the development of commitment.

Psychological commitment is described as a psychological contract based on the expectation from the employee that they will be treated fairly and justly by the organization in exchange for providing the organization with loyalty, dedication, and hard work (Gomez-Mejia, Balkin & Cardy, 1998).

In today's work environment, psychological (or relational) contracts act as antecedents to organizational commitment. When an organization seeks to understand why an employee commits to one organization or another, the answer might not lie in a paper contract that outlines the salary, compensation, and job responsibilities; it may lie within the employee's psychological expectations regarding where the relationship begins.

Usually, employees who seek employment in nonprofit organizations identify with the organization's mission and values, which may be embedded in their own identifiable values that mimic those of the organization. Harrison (1987) maintains that

“caring and responsive service, not just efficiency and competence are such service that is given by people who themselves feel valued and cared for by their organization” (p. 14). Nonprofit employees attach more meaning to performing a valuable service for social causes, and the desire to fulfill this mission not only attracts them to the organization but also retains them. Overall, confidence in mission and values demonstrates the expectations that must be satisfied if belief is to lead the way toward organizational commitment.

Hiring for mission is a process by which an organization considers the job applicants’ commitment to the mission as a major criterion when interviewing and evaluating whether they should be hired as employees (Passon, 1997). For over 30 years, this process has been used as a means of addressing the challenge of providing a qualified talent pool to work toward service-related activities. Although a strong mission statement can reflect the direction of the organization, the employees must be able to attach and identify themselves with the central focus of the organization’s mission. It is the expectation that the belief in the mission and the connection employees have to that mission will continue to attract and retain employees in nonprofits (Mason, 1996). Exploring employees’ attachment to the mission can perhaps explain its relevance in retaining employees.

Definition of Terms

Affective Commitment: An “employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organization” (Allen & Meyer, 1990, p. 1).

Attitudinal Commitment: A state in which an employee can connect with a particular organization's goal, and wants to remain in order to see those set goals fulfilled (Mowday et al., 1979).

Continuance Commitment: The perceived cost impact employees relate to when separating from a company (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Employee Retention: An organization's method of retaining an employee's services to work toward organizational goals (Kim & Lee, 2007).

For-profit firm: An organization whose strategic goal is to make a profit and whose mission is to meet the economic interest of the shareholders (Rotolo & Wilson, 2006).

Mission: A tool that provides a clear, compelling statement of purpose that the organization disseminates both internally and externally (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003).

Mission Attachment: An "awareness of the mission, agreement with its principles, and confidence in one's ability to carry it out" (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003, p 8).

Mission Statement: Defines an organization, expressing its values and envisioning its future simply and clearly (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003).

Nonprofit Organization: An organization whose values and goals are aligned with a mission to serve a cause or help others (Fiorito, Bozeman, Young & Meurs, 2007).

Normative Commitment: A sense of obligation on behalf of the employee to want to stay employed with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Organizational Commitment: A person's strong association and identification with an organization (Mowday et al., 1982).

Organizational Commitment Questionnaire: A widely used 15-item scale designed to assess one's acceptance of organizational values, willingness to exert efforts, and desire to maintain membership in the organization (Mowday et al., 1979; Porter et al., 1974).

Psychological Contract: A psychological contract between the employee and employer occurs when the employee believes that he will be treated fairly in return for providing the employer with his labor (Rousseau, 1989).

Volunteers: People who freely offer help or service to others, theoretically unknown to them, without receiving or expecting any economic reward (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991).

Assumptions and Limitations

Research studies have many assumptions and limitations. These are often concerned with the way in which the study is generalized to a specific population. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) propose that assumptions are what the researcher takes for granted, and may cause misunderstanding within the study.

One major assumption was that all solicited participants would show sufficient interest in the proposed study to provide thought-provoking, honest responses to the interview questions. Another assumption was that common core themes would emerge within the study to support the research question. Although research studies have given some attention to mission and mission-related hiring, no specific study has attempted to establish a qualitative congruity of mission attachment and organizational commitment among nonprofit employees. This qualitative exploratory study attempted to fill this gap in literature. The intention of this study was not to make any generalizations for a large

population; it was to gain a deeper understanding of a smaller population regarding mission attachment and organizational commitment among nonprofit employees.

Creswell (1998) contended that limitations reveal the weaknesses of an identified study. An identified limitation to this study was that it was strictly voluntary. No one was forced to participate. Additionally, the sample size was not differentiated by gender, age, or demographic status because doing so would not represent the broader population. One final limitation to this study was that the researcher did not live in the same geographical locations as the participants, so face-to-face interviews were not conducted. The researcher's ability to observe participants' facial expressions and body language would have added more contexts to the scope of the study during data collection and analysis; however, the need to travel to a different state, along with conflicting schedules from consenting participants, would have made this study far too expensive and time-consuming.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 2 of this research presents a literature review. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and research design which will include a discussion of the target population, the study sample, and the measurement instrument from which data will be collected and examined. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis. Chapter 5 presents the results of the study and provides recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter 2 will provide a brief examination of research related to the nonprofit organization and its employees to establish the context for mission attachment and the psychological levels of organizational commitment. Further examination of organizational commitment exposes the psychological contract and relationship that employees can have with the organization, which affect their intent to remain.

Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations play important roles within the U.S. economy. According to Gose (2005), within the last 25 years, the number of nonprofits registered with the IRS has increased by 38%. Small neighborhood-based nonprofits whose annual income is below \$5,000 do not have to register with the IRS and are not counted in total registered nonprofits; this under-represents the overall number of nonprofits (Berry, 2005).

Various nonprofit organizations provide needed services to support the quality of life for many individuals (Drucker, 2001b). As social demand increases, more nonprofits will emerge to support the many programs and services needed. Nonprofit organizations are advocates for the poor and disadvantaged in a political system that offers few resolutions to their social needs (Berry, 2005).

Traditionally, nonprofits exist to provide a positive change in the lives of people through the unselfish work of staff and volunteers (Hansenfield, 1992). Salamon (1999) identified six characteristics of nonprofit organizations: (1) nonprofits are formal organizations which manage under related laws, have the ability to hold property, take on

various contracts, and persevere through a long period of time; (2) nonprofits are private organizations apart from the government; (3) they are nonprofit-distributing; (4) they are largely self-governing; (5) there is not a mandatory requirement for participating on the board; it is voluntary; and (6) they serve some public benefit.

The United States social welfare system has depended on nonprofits to fill the needs that the government system does not provide (Smith, 1998). Nonprofits tend to be flexible, which allow them to tailor national or state programs to fit local needs (Smith, 1998). These nonprofits have demonstrated their worth by continuing to provide valuable services to others (Gerstein, Wilkeson, & Anderson, 2004).

Many nonprofits are viewed as low-cost, but efficient, organizations staffed by professionals and volunteers committed to work tirelessly toward their mission (Berry, 2005). Unlike for-profit firms, nonprofits are not committed to the distribution of profitable earnings, but rely on generous funding from numerous donors and constituents willing to invest in charitable projects (Emanuele & Higgins, 2000). The condition of nonprofits is best explained by Halpern (1998):

The nonprofit sector is under duress, both from within and from without. By the year 2020, it may well have changed so much as to be unrecognizable, or may simply not exist. Those who believe in its importance have failed to explore seriously the issues at stake or to promote public awareness of the issues. We must recognize that although there have been huge changes in the world in the past quarter-century; nonprofit practitioners have not done the work of self-renewal that needs to be done. What is needed now is a concerted effort both to champion the nonprofit sector against attacks and to reconfigure it to make it more effective and accountable in relation to the new economic, political, and social realities we face. We need to seize the opportunity to shape the nonprofit sector of the future. (p. 5)

Nonprofit Employees

Throughout American history, service to others has been highly valued (Gerstein, Wilkerson & Anderson 2004). Employees work for nonprofit organizations to achieve a higher quality of life for many individuals who fall through the cracks (Drucker, 1989). Nonprofit organizations take seriously the need to provide for those whom others choose to ignore. Berry's (2005) theory of post-materialism suggests that people are in search of ways to contribute to the greater good through involvement with, and contributions to, communities and nonprofit organizations.

Employees are considered the most valuable assets many organizations possess (Passon, 1997). Nonprofits have approximately 12.5 million Americans working for them, and they are responsible for approximately six percent of the gross domestic product (Moore, 2004). Employees seek fulfillment within the employer-employee relationship, where growth, job satisfaction, and shared values inspire loyalty and motivation to work toward organizational goals (Capelli, 2000). The prevailing view has been that an increasing proportion of the workforce has been attracted to employment within the nonprofit sector to support various social programs and mission initiatives (Mirvis & Hackett, 1983).

Nonprofits, like for-profits and government agencies, seek to recruit and retain the most qualified, talented individuals. In addition, nonprofits seek candidates who want to support their mission (Akingbola, 2006). Although nonprofit organizations do not make supporting the mission a condition of employment, candidates who are able to align with organizational goals and shared mission values are better at promoting and working on needed projects and programs. When alignment and attachment have been made, many

of the candidates become tenured employees who remain with the organization and are content working toward mission goals that serve for the betterment of others.

Nonprofit organizations continue to face numerous challenges as they enter the twenty-first century (Alexander, 1999). A study of several large nonprofits in 1999 showed that not only did they lack needed revenue flow, but they also lacked needed knowledgeable staff who could adjust to increasing social needs (Alexander, 1999). In a society where the wheels of organizational structure are propelled by the knowledge of acquired human capital, competition for this commodity must not be taken lightly.

According to Alexander (1999), the biggest challenge for nonprofits is the ability to attract and retain knowledgeable workers. Nonprofit and for-profit firms compete to attract highly skilled and competent workers from the same labor pool (Jeavons, 1994; Sunoo, 1998; Emanuele & Higgins, 2000). The same talent and skills necessary to administer and manage for-profit firms are equally important in successfully driving nonprofits' organizational missions. This need to attract and retain human capital has become a major issue for numerous nonprofit organizations (Harkins, 1998; Weiss, 1997).

Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards can be factors in both for-profit firms and nonprofit organizations. Mirvis and Hackett (1983) explained that in for-profit firms, employees are motivated by extrinsic rewards, such as promotions or increased compensation, whereas nonprofit employees are motivated by intrinsic rewards, such as flexibility, opportunities, and working toward a greater cause. The intrinsic rewards allow employees to accept lower wages yet enjoy greater satisfaction in the work they perform

to improve the quality of life for many other individuals (Mirvis & Hackett, 1983).

Cheverton (2007) contends:

It is unlikely that nonprofit organizations have mainly attracted those employees who systemically react to extrinsic rewards i.e., income maximizer and status-oriented employee ... nonprofit organizations are more attractive for loyal employees who identify themselves with the mission and organizational goals. Achieving the organization's mission rather than increasing the organization's surplus or individuals' salaries are what motivate those working in the nonprofit sector. (p. 430)

Studies have shown that nonprofit employees have values different from those of private-sector employees due to the various economic reasons that attracted them (Mason, 1996; Karl & Sutton, 1998; Macy, 2006). According to Dove (1997), "Values are evaluative standards relating to work or the work environment by which individuals discern what is right or assess the importance of preferences" (p. 227). When employees are at odds with the collective values of the organization, retention, commitment, and emotional attachment cannot form due to the misalignment that is present. Therefore, if values are asserted as an important factor, the need to have individuals with personal values that are similar or identical to those held by the organization leads to commitment levels greater than those of individuals whose personal values differ from those of the organization (Finegan, 2000).

Nonprofit employees work together better when they realize they share the same values (Andrews, 1992). Additionally, nonprofits tend to have employees whose values are connected to the overall mission of the company and are mainly tied to intrinsic rewards. However in for-profit firms, for-profit employees' values are usually tied to those extrinsic rewards that compensate them based upon the firm's overall performance and that have a direct link to the mission (Townsend, 2000).

Many nonprofit employees operate in ways similar to volunteers. Volunteers are willing to give their talents and labor freely without a compensatory market return for their time (Weisbrod, 1983; Finegan, 2000; Macy, 2006). Nonprofit employees do receive compensatory rewards for their labor; however, it is not as competitively given as those who work in for-profit firms. The connection to their shared values and the belief in the mission of the organization are two of the reasons many nonprofit employees willingly forgo higher salaries and other benefits to remain with an organization where providing service to others is the center of focus (Emanuele & Higgins, 2000).

Individuals also come to nonprofit organizations with high aspirations and much passion to work toward accomplishing a mission that other corporations do not completely meet, namely, serving charitable needs (Meehan III, 2008). Giving of oneself has its own rewards for those who value the servant role. Berry (2005) contends that “theories of post-materialism suggest that in a country such as ours, people search for meaning in their lives and try to contribute to the greater good through nonprofits, involvement in the community, and charitable activities” (p. 568).

Some for-profit firms also have the desire to assist in charitable needs; however, their needs are usually based on social responsibility that the community places on them for operating a business within their domain. For-profit employees want to work for companies that are socially responsible; however, their intentions may be twofold. While employees want to express their commitment to community involvement, they also want opportunities for personal advancement through networking and connection with other companies (Bhattacharya, Sen & Korschum, 2008).

Value of Retention

Due the various studies showing a link between employee turnover and commitment, retention continues to be the most researched and studied outcome in organizational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Porter et al., 1974). As more employers strive to find the best strategy to retain current employees and attract new ones, organizations continue to maintain an interest in retention because of the influence it can have on productivity and work-related issues (Cook, 2000; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). Two important factors in helping to support a nonprofit organization are maintenance of loyalty of donors and constituents, and retention of highly qualified talent to work toward mission-related causes (Ban, Drohna & Towers, 2003). Each of these factors is equally important in order to meet expectations that are measured not only internally, but also externally, by needed funding, which is evident in the growing social needs that most corporate and government sectors are unable or unwilling to meet.

Filling vacant positions in the nonprofit world can be an overwhelming task that impacts training, service offering, and searching for qualified candidates (Kim & Lee, 2007). Since the burden of providing needed social services lies at the door of nonprofit organizations, the nonprofit sector needs not only to attract the right talent but also to retain these individuals (Emanuele & Higgins, 2000). Retention of valued employees is needed to support their mission and meet organizational goals (Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Lambert, Hogan & Barton, 2001; Saari & Judge, 2004). Alexander (1999) declared:

One of the biggest challenges for nonprofits in competition with for-profits involves holding on to “knowledge worker” employees with portable skills, often in the form of credentials or professional licensing, who through their training may develop greater allegiance to their professions than to the organization in which they work”. (p. 68)

Recruitment is critical for nonprofit organizations and many for-profit firms.

Candidates who are selected for needed vacancies must not only present the valued knowledge and skills for the job, but also must believe in the mission and values of the nonprofit. Some of the competencies they require from candidates to meet challenges in their work environments can be exclusive, and certain skill sets are needed that may include knowledge of other nonprofit organizations or charities.

Although research has not provided evidence to support mission-centered hiring, Brown and Yoshioka (2002) contend that, although nonprofit leaders might not require employees to believe in the mission as a condition of employment, a nonprofit’s mission plays an important part in daily management functions and operations. Therefore, it is imperative for nonprofit leaders and human resources managers to look at recruiting as an important strategic function.

Frequent turnover of staff in an organization can negate efficient recruiting efforts. In a study conducted by the Institute for Future Aging Services, costs of turnover for nursing aides ranged from \$2,000 to \$5,276 for a paraprofessional direct care worker (Kim & Lee, 2007). Much of the direct cost is usually absorbed in the salaries of human resources professionals, training, and overtime pay for the employees who have to fill the gaps. In addition, work that is delegated to remaining staff can cause burnout and other stress-related issues.

Employees choose to leave their place of employment due to unmet expectations, values misalignment, and lack of recognition (Mirvis & Hackett, 1983). Harkins (1998) suggested that employees choose to leave organizations for five reasons: (1) the confidence factor (when employees lose confidence and hope, they begin to think the “grass is greener” in another company, where there seems to be more focus); (2) the emotional factor (employees leave an organization because they lack recognition, adequate rewards, and focus on personal development); (3) the trust factor (too many broken promises from the employer destroy employees’ sense of loyalty); (4) the fit factor (employees need to feel that their values and principles match those of the organization); and (5) the listening factors (employees want to be heard, and if the organization continues to ignore them, they feel staying is not worthwhile). The fit and trust factor closely align with organizational commitment wherein employees want to remain with an organization where their own values, feelings, and loyalty closely align with those of their employer.

In an effort to retain staff, some nonprofit organizations attempt to meet some financial and nonfinancial expectations to assure employees that they have made the right decision to join and remain as valued workers who will continue to support the mission. Brandel (2001) contends that some nonprofits use the following benefits to retain employees: (1) superb and supported work-life balance; (2) generous time off; (3) flexible work schedules; and (4) sabbaticals. Although many of these benefits might not be included in all nonprofit organizations, most of them are standard recruiting and retention tools (Brandel, 2001).

Due to corporate and organizational downsizing, outsourcing, and resizing, many organizations are left with little to offer in the area of compensation and benefits.

Barbeito and Bowman (1998) posited that although most nonprofit employees work toward the mission, nonprofits should continue to enhance their employee benefits to maintain a somewhat competitive advantage. Most significantly, employers should understand the psychological contract that led the employee to the organization in the beginning. The attachment to the mission is only the beginning of employees' expectations that influence their decision to join and remain with the organization.

Mission Attachment

The goals, beliefs, and values of many organizations are expressed in their mission statements, which adorn walls, are printed on pens and mugs, and are published in the organization's literature. The mission can date back centuries to the origins of an organization and reflect the principles on which it was founded. Abrahams (1999) highlights the purpose of the mission when he states, "The mission should guide behaviors like the Ten Commandments, defining values and behavior standards" (p. 449). Abrahams (1999) reported that "mission statements have been a part of working life and human history since the beginning of time ... with the first mission statement recorded in the book of Genesis in the command 'Be fruitful and multiply'" (p. 7).

Drucker (2001a) proposed that the cause of most business leaders' frustration is the inadequate thought given to the organization's mission and the psychological link between the employee and the organization. McManus (2000) adds:

People have the option of embracing the mission or not. This will not realize the true synergistic power that comes from having a clearly articulated mission unless

we take the opportunity to understand how people identify themselves with it and the organization. (p. 20)

Drucker (1989) reported that the best nonprofits devote a great deal of thought to defining their organizational mission. A shared mission among employees can become the basis for defining an organization's structure, goals, and values (Desmid & Prinzie, 2008; George, 1999; Glasrud, 2001). Instilling a sense of alignment where employees and the mission are congruent can be a critical element of success (Whitham, 2007). Furthermore, Goll and Sambharya (1995) explained, "The mission has a unifying power that ties the individual to the organization and contributes to an esprit de corps" (p. 828).

Hesselbein and Cohen (1999), authorities on nonprofit organizations and their mission, stated that "at the heart of every great group is a shared dream, and all great groups believe that ... they could change the world ... that belief is what brings the necessary cohesion and energy to their work" (p. 317). Employees want to feel that they relate to and understand the mission of the organization and how it aligns with the overall strategic direction. Bettinger (1990) contended:

In order to excel, we all need something to believe in; something that will exert a powerful, consistent influence on our day-to-day behaviors; something that will forge a common will to achieve high performance; and something that will enable us to reach our determined objectives. (p. 158)

However, Helms and Frazee (1994) cautioned that one should not assume that all employees, especially those in nonprofits, understand and closely identify with the mission and how it relates to the organization, without providing data to determine whether this synergy has taken place.

In a survey conducted with child welfare caseworkers, Rycraft (1994) reported that attachment to the mission was the number one reason for staying. A 2002 Brookings Institution survey of 1,213 human services workers concluded that nonprofit employees tend to be the most satisfied of all sectors, and that mission remains the major attraction for nonprofit employees (Light, 2003). These results show that employees who are less likely to exit the organization are those who find themselves more committed (Delobbe & Vandenberghe, 2000).

Certain key factors can influence the way nonprofit employees relate to the organization's mission. Kristoff (1996) identified the following two determining factors: (1) The organization's purpose must be salient in the employees' minds. Are they aware of the organization's mission and value? (2) The employees must agree with the expressed purpose and values of the organization. Are they committed? However, Mason (1996) stated that employees must feel a psychological or emotional connection with the mission to enable them to make a commitment to the organization.

Several studies have been conducted on various levels of mission attachment. A quantitative study led by Brown and Yoshioka (2003) inquired into the congruity of mission attachment and job satisfaction factors bearing on employee retention. The study surveyed 991 nonprofit youth and recreation employees to examine their attitudes toward the mission and their intent to stay with the organization. The study included 16 different geographical locations to obtain a broader sample. Brown and Yoshioka (2003) assessed mission attachment through four statements from which employees could gauge their awareness of and contributions to the organization's mission: (1) I am aware of the direction and mission of the organization; (2) The programs and staff at my branch

support the mission; (3) I like to work for the organization because I believe in its mission and values; and (4) My work contributes to carrying out the mission of the organization. The employees answered the questions based on a four-point Likert scale, in which the lower numbers indicated higher levels of agreement. The study revealed that tenured employees expressed a greater attachment to the mission and commitment to stay than employees who had only been with the organization for a short period of time due to the work they were providing for the community.

Brown and Yoshioka (2003) found that all facets of satisfaction of mission attachment and intention to stay were positively correlated with each other. They posited that one of the major reasons employees stayed with an organization was “their belief in the mission and the desire to help people” (p. 13). However, they added:

Despite the mission’s significant and fundamental role in the management and leadership of nonprofits, we know relatively little about how employees perceive the mission and how those perceptions relate to other organizational attitudes (such as satisfaction) and behaviors (such as turnover). (p. 6)

Given the significant value that mission can have in an organization, it is surprising that so little research has been done in this area (Bolon, 2005).

Mission Statement Weakness

Mission statements can have a positive effect on the structure and goals of an organization. Bart (1999) warned that “despite the prevalence of mission statements, there is little guidance available for how they should be managed” (p. 37). When a mission statement becomes disjointed from its purpose and values, it can lose power to develop commitment among its employees. McManus (2000) contended:

Missions are like quality systems: All organizations have them even though they aren't very effective. Unfortunately, it is often the case that the mission statement printed on company mugs, T-shirts, banners, and business cards is inconsistent with what employees experience each day in company cubicles, board rooms, and assembly areas. (p. 20)

The mission statement should be congruent with the daily activities of the workplace and consistent with the values and principles that it has documented. The mission should be the heartbeat of the organization, pulling employers and employees together in harmony. If employees are perplexed about the clarity and direction of the mission statement, the rest of society may be experiencing the same ambiguity and confusion.

Senior leadership expends little effort to ensure that mission statements are properly formulated before they are released (Bart 1997). Consistent changes in an organization due to various economic or social factors can cause a paradigm shift in the overall strategic direction. If the mission statement is no longer congruent with the goals of the organization, the statement becomes obsolete and should be replaced with one that reflects its current goals. When mission statements become outdated, employees lose confidence in organizational goals and how they will be accomplished. Bart (1997) added, "It is hard to imagine any substantial team-building with an organization where there is so little agreement on something so fundamental to organizational success as the mission" (p. 12).

A mission statement should be clearly understood and articulated so that each employee can understand how it relates to his or her work. McManus (2000) cautioned that if the employees cannot understand how to embrace the mission, the organization "will not realize the true synergistic power that comes from having a clearly articulated

mission that most of the workforce takes serious ownership in” (p. 20). Consequently, the fact that most external stakeholders, such as donors or other constituents rely heavily on the mission means that it is crucial to the operation of the organization for the mission statement to connect the people to its goals clearly. Further, McManus asks, “If all of the mission-decorated banners, mugs, and wall hangings were removed from the organization, would people still know what the mission is?” (p. 20).

In a study of principals from high- and low-performing schools, Chubb and Moore (1990) found that academic excellence was achieved in high-performing public schools where shared mission and ideology among principal and teachers was a major component in overall academic success. Recurring themes in the study included the importance of school mission and the articulation and support from leadership. Researchers since the 1970s have recognized a school’s or a department’s vision or collective sense of purpose as a vital characteristic for successful and improving schools (Conger, 1991).

Shared Vision

When nonprofit leaders want to boost the effectiveness of their organization, they set their sights on rejuvenating the mission (Kilpatrick & Silverman, 2005). Without a clear vision of the mission, nonprofits lose focus and are unable fulfill the strategic mission’s critical goals. Deciding how to use the shared vision as a tool to keep the organization focused may lead to innovative ways by which returns on charitable dollars can be gainfully recognized.

Long before mission statements were used as the focus of organizations, shared vision was a way to connect the employees with the beliefs and values of the

organization. Mission statements are shared visions that fuse the understanding of the beliefs, values, and goals of the organization. Acquiring a sense of shared vision among employees is not an easy task (McManus, 2000). According to Kilpatrick and Silverman (2005),

most effective visions comprise a compelling, easy-to-understand description of how the nonprofit would like the world to change in the next three to five years, what role the organization will play in that change, and how the nonprofit will measure the success of its role. (p. 25)

Senge (1990) is an advocate of shared vision. He contends that “the practice of shared vision involves the skills of unearthing shared ‘pictures of the future’ that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance” (p. 9). Many employees gain a sense of self-worth from their jobs (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985). It is these values that employees hold that create a sense of shared vision.

Senge (1990) understands that merely writing a vision statement (mission statement) does not provide a shared vision. It is a good beginning, but a shared vision expands due to a reinforcing process. Senge contends that “increased clarity, enthusiasm and commitment rub off on others in the organization, and as people talk the vision grows clear; as it gets clear, enthusiasm for its benefits grow” (p. 227). This type of camaraderie provides a collective commitment and vision to the organization that can provide focus and clarity to meet the mission’s critical goals. Calfee (1993) emphasized, “Whether it is called a mission statement or vision statement, such a description of the road ahead, of how the organization defines success, and of important shared values and beliefs can have a powerful and positive impact on the organization” (p. 54).

Organizational Commitment

Within the last several years, organizational commitment has surfaced as a fundamental concept in the investigation of work attitudes and behavior (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer & Allen, 1984; Reichers, 1985). Organizational commitment continues to be a chief variable in the study of employment and organizations (Fiorito, Bozeman, Young & Meurs, 2007). This study of organizational commitment can help clarify the linkage between an individual and the organization (Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian, 1974; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979).

Over the years, scholars have proposed various definitions for organizational commitment. Sheldon (1971) described organizational commitment as a way of thinking that connected the individual's characteristics to the organization. Prior research from Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian (1974) looked at commitment from the relationship of the connection and engagement that a person has with the organization. Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) asserted that "organizational commitment represents something beyond mere passive loyalty to an organization; it involves an active relationship with the organization such that individuals are willing to give something of themselves in order to contribute to the organizational commitment as a theory which deals with the psychological links with which an individual can bond to other individuals or organizations" (p. 230).

Elizur and Koslowsky (2001) posited organizational commitment as the emotional and functional attachment of an employee to his work place. All of these definitions show the bond of individuals to their organizations. This view of commitment by Allen and Meyer (1990) derived from Kanter (1968) variously described as "cohesion

commitment” or “the attachment of an individual’s emotion to the group” (p. 507). Each one of the definitions describes a distinct level at which the employee was engaged with the organization. However, Meyer and Allen (1990) propose that an individual’s psychological state can be determined on three separate commitment levels.

Three Component Model of Organizational Commitment

Early research from Meyer and Allen (1984) intended only to show a difference between two commitments, continuance and affective. Several studies address these two major theories of organizational commitment, which provide much of the literature relating to understanding the construct of organizational commitment. It was later that Allen and Meyer (1990) introduced the third component, normative, which related to the perceived obligation for an individual to remain with an organization and which, along with the other two components, collectively conceptualized the Three Component Model. The conceptualized model embraced the concept there is a relationship between the psychological state of the employee and the organization.

Allen and Meyer (1990) and Meyer and Allen (1991) hypothesized that organizational commitment is a paradigm with three distinct elements: affective (the need for employees to be committed and engaged on an emotional level); continuance (the need for or the awareness of the cost of leaving the organization); and normative (the feeling of obligation to remain). Other research findings have concluded that affective, continuance, and normative have characteristics which differentiate them (Dunham, Grube & Castaneda, 1994; McGee & Ford, 1987; Reilly & Orsak, 1991). Allen and Meyer (1990) contend that employees experience all three forms of commitment to varying degrees, which can influence behavior. For example, one employee may feel a

strong obligation to remain with the organization but little or no desire or emotional attachment to stay, whereas another employee may have a strong emotional attachment to the organization but little obligation to remain. Additionally, an employee may have a connection to all three of the components to varying degrees; however, each component develops separately and can result in various effects on employees work behaviors, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions (Allen & Meyer, 1990: Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997).

Buchanan (1974) stated, “Commitment is viewed as a partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of an organization, to one’s role in relation to goals and values, and to the organization for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth” (p. 533). This definition predated Allen and Meyer (1990) and Meyer and Allen’s (1991) exploration of organizational commitment as a multidimensional construct.

Furthermore, Buchanan (1974) identified the three components associated with organizational commitment: (1) a sense of identification with the organizational mission; (2) a feeling of involvement or psychological immersion in organization duties; and (3) a feeling of loyalty and affection for the organization as a place to live and work, quite apart from the merits of its mission or its purely instrumental value to the individual.

Allen and Meyer’s (1990) model borrowed from Becker’s (1960) model of continuance commitment, the second component in their model. Becker’s research was limited to measuring the cost or loss associated with employees leaving the organization. Becker’s (1960) model recognized this loss and contended that “without this recognition, there is no commitment” (p. 65). However, a study conducted by Meyer and Allen (1984), involving university students and their level of commitment to their academic studies, showed that the students had an affective attachment to their academic program

instead of a continuance commitment. This study was contrary to Becker's (1960) model, which suggested that individuals are committed due to the perceived costs of disassociation directly related to continuance commitment.

Allen and Meyer's (1990) Three-component model continues to be regarded as the dominant model in organizational research (Bentein, Vandenberg, Vandenberghe, & Stinglhamber, 2005; Cohen, 2003; Greenberg & Baron, 2003). The Three Component Model has been used in various public and private sectors, and the studies have resulted in an accumulation of evidence involving different effects on work behaviors (Meyer & Allen, 1988, 1997). Consequently, the model continues to have the best relevance for individuals conducting research on commitment.

According to Meyer and Allen (1991) the three-component model continues to:

(a) specify clearly the nature of the construct under examination, (b) use measures that are reliable and valid indicators of the intended construct, (c) examine the proposed antecedent-commitment and commitment-behavioral links using procedures designed to test the implicit casual hypotheses, (d) explore the relations among the components of commitment, both within and across time, as well as the link between affective and behavioral commitment, and (e) pay greater attention to the processes involved in both the development and consequences of commitment. (p. 83)

Meyer and Allen (1991) suggest that human resources professionals use the model as more than a tool to measure and reduce turnover, but use it in a way to "increase commitment among employees including their personal well-being and willingness to work toward the attainment of organizational goals" (p. 83).

Psychological Contracts

Another concept frequently mentioned in literature pertaining to organizational commitment has been psychological contracts. Before elucidating the components of

organizational commitment, one must understand how and why the psychological contracts are formed between the employer and employee, for these can have a detrimental effect on the relationship and commitment level.

The term *psychological contract* originated in research done in the 1960s (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The term was cited by Morrison and Robinson (1997) from researchers Levinson, Price Munden, and Solley (1962) who defined it as:

expectations about the reciprocal obligations that compose an employee-organization exchange relationship. More specifically ... a psychological contract [is] a set of beliefs about what each party is entitled to receive, and obligated to give, in exchange for another party's contributions. (p. 228)

Although traditional definitions are helpful in understanding the origin of a term or theory, further explanation of a theory is imperative to understand it in today's ever-changing work environment.

Rousseau and Grueller (1994) described the psychological contract as “an individual's system of belief, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between the employee and the organization” (p. 385). Additionally, Spindler (1994) defined the contract as “the bundle of unexpressed expectations that exist at the interfaces between humans” (p. 326). According to Coyle-Shapiro and Shore (2007), the traditional psychological contract alluded to the employer providing job security in exchange for employees' commitment to performing their jobs. Collectively, understanding of the psychological contract given by various researchers represents the belief on the part of employees that they will be treated in a fair and equitable manner in return for giving their talents and dedication to their work (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Even more important to the relational aspect of the contract is the behavior that the organization exhibits toward its employees (Parks & Schmedermann, 1994). Since the psychological contract is the basis of the relationship between the employer and the employee, the various components of organizational commitment are based on the subjective expectations and commitment level of each employee. Research has indicated that violating this contract can lead to severe consequences for the employee and the employer if what was promised does not match what has been received (Robinson, 1996). An understanding of the psychological contract with individuals in relationship to the Three Component Organizational Commitment Scale in which behaviors and expectations can be known may determine whether the psychological bond one has with the mission ensures his or her continuance with the organization.

Affective Commitment

Several research studies in organizational commitment have maintained a focal point in the area of affective commitment (Mohamed, Taylor & Hassan, 2006). Affective commitment has also been called *attitudinal commitment* (Mowday et al. 1979); Riketta, 2002; Karin & Noor, 2006). Meyer and Allen (1991) explained:

Attitudinal commitment focuses on the process by which people come to think about their relationship with the organization. In many ways it can be thought of as a mind set in which individuals consider the extent to which their own values and goals are congruent with those of the organization. (p. 62)

Several definitions have been cited in defining affective commitment, which is primarily associated with the research of Porter et al. (1974) and Mowday et al. (1979). According to Porter et al. (1974), affective commitment comprises the following: “(1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organizational goals and values; (2) a willingness to

exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a desire to maintain organizational membership” (p. 604). A definition from Salancik and Pfeffer (1997) describes affective commitment as “a psychological bond, a personal attachment to the organization” (p. 65). Furthermore, Mowday et al. (1979) link affective commitment to attitudinal commitment, which relates to a person’s identification and involvement with the organization. Despite the various definitions proposed for affective commitment, most researchers agree that affective commitment is the most desirable predictor of employee retention (Allen et al., 2003; Meyer & Smith, 2000; Rhoades et al., 2002).

Employees who exhibit a strong affective commitment have an emotional bond with the organization; they want to become involved; and they desire to remain a member of the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1984; Allen & Meyer, 1987; Meyer, Sampo et al., 1989). When organizational members exhibit affective commitment, they portray a degree of loyalty that causes employees to give more to the organization than the general expectations of what would be considered normal commitment (Gould, 1979). If the theory is a true predictor of affective commitment, when affective commitment is based on the shared values and emotional ties that nonprofit employees have to the mission, then tenure with the organization can be gained by their commitment to achieve the overall purpose of the organization’s mission.

Empirical data, through social theory, presented how employees who are supported and cared for by their organization exhibited more affective commitment (Eisenberger et al. 1990; Allen et al., 2003). Being treated with a sense of dignity and respect makes the employees feel that the organization values their talent and is equally concerned for their well-being (Mohamed et al., 2006). As with nonprofit employees, the

intrinsic rewards that are emotionally rooted in the organization bind them to the organization, which results in more of a commitment to stay.

A survey conducted by Mohamed et al (2006) of 1,450 corrections officers in a Mid-South region of the United States resulted in a positive statistical correlation to affective commitment based on the hypothesis that a caring and supportive work environment raised employees' levels of affective commitment. To measure the degree of affective commitment among corrections officers, Mohamed et al. (2006) study used statements such as "I have a strong sense of loyalty to the Department of Corrections", and "I made a good decision when I came to work for the Department of Corrections" (p. 519). Mohamed et al. concluded that their study showed consistency with previous research conducted by Eisenberger et al. (1990) where intangibles, identified as motivating factors, played a major in role in how the employees felt about the organization and their commitment level to it. When organizations offer the support system needed by employees, they demonstrate a positive level of commitment to remain with the organization and support its goals.

Other theorists' evidence shows that employees tend to exemplify greater affective commitment when the organization supports and cares for them (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Allen et al., 2003; Rhoades et al., 2003). Nonprofit employees work for the organization because they feel a sense of emotional attachment to the mission work. One way to gain affective commitment and organizational support is through positive human resources practices and concern shown by the organization for the employees (Mohamed, Taylor & Hassan, 2006).

Several studies have shown the relationships that exist among affective commitment and absenteeism, turnover, and performance (Mowday et al. 1982; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Blau and Boal (1987) contended that employees who exhibited affective commitment had high job involvement and were least likely to leave the organization. These employees are more involved in the organization and committed to driving mission initiatives. Allen and Meyer (1990) posited that:

the most prevalent approach to organizational commitment in the literature is one in which commitment is considered an affective or emotional attachment to the organization such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in, the organization. (p. 2)

Continuance Commitment

The research on continuance commitment has not been as complete as the attention given to affective commitment (Meyer & Smith, 2000). Continuance commitment is portrayed as the most straightforward, compared to the other commitment levels (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Continuance commitment describes an individual's need to remain with the organization based on the perceived cost of leaving (Meyer & Smith, 2000). This level of commitment tends to focus on the rationale behind an employee's decision to leave the organization. To elaborate, Meyer and Allen (1991) explained, "In the case of continuance commitment to an organization, a side bet is made when something of importance to an individual becomes contingent upon continued employment in that organization" (p. 64).

The employees' perceived cost of leaving an organization can be tangible or intangible, or it can be based on economic reasons (Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001). Some of those recognized continuance costs can be realized in (1) the costs in

losing good pay; (2) the costs related to a new job search; (3) the costs related to relocation; and (4) the costs in losing good contacts and networks (Dordevic, 2004). In addition, other factors, such as age or specialized job skills, can prevent employees from exploring viable alternatives.

Meyer and Allen (1990) contend that those employees whose skills are not marketable would not experience continuance commitment until the time at which their skills are congruent with the market. In addition, Meyer and Allen (1990) added, “In some cases, potential costs develop as the direct result of actions taken by the employee with full recognition that they will make leaving the organization more difficult (e.g., accepting a job assignment that requires very specialized skills training)” (p. 77).

Furthermore, Meyer, Bobocel and Allen (1991) contended that, with new employees, they would factor in the time dedicated to the job search and the training as wasted if they left the organization.

A research study by Meyer et al. (1989) on employees in a food services organization found that when the commitment from the employee is based solely on recognition of the costs of leaving the organization, benefits of decreased turnover can be gained, but it will be at the cost of poor performance. The level of performance will continue to be minimal, and the employee will continue to stay with the organization simply because they cannot afford to leave. As such, the employee becomes committed to the organization based only upon the costs associated with leaving. Additionally, Fiorito et al. (2007) warn that even incentive pay can become problematic when employees are more committed to the pay earnings than to the organization. Therefore, organizations should be careful when rapidly promoting employees or offering other

specialized organizational training and incentives that bind employees to the organization when only the thought of losing these benefits retains them.

Normative Commitment

Normative commitment has received relatively less attention than the other two types of commitment (Dunham, Grube & Castaneda, 1994). This component has been described as an organizational member's feeling of obligation to stay with the organization (Wiener, 1982; Meyer & Smith, 2000). It is this pressure of personal loyalty or obligation that creates normative commitment.

The third mind-set in the three-component model was labeled as normative commitment, which provided a link between affective and normative commitment in that both require a sense of employee loyalty to the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1984, 1991). O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) utilized the label of normative commitment to replace the terms *identification* and *internalization* in their multidimensional model. However, their interpretation of the term is closely related to Meyer and Allen's definition of affective commitment and should not be interpreted as a duplicate of Meyer and Allen's definition of normative commitment (Caldwell et al., 1990; O'Reilly et al., 1986).

According to Williams (2004), normative commitment is defined as the employees' perception of their obligation to their organization. Scholars have argued that normative commitment is described as the employee's strong feeling of obligation to the organization while working toward an obtainable goal (Meyer, & Herscovitch, 2001). When employees are loyal to the organization, the organization may return their appreciation in rewards of various forms. The rewards may include compensation for

post-secondary education and training, providing child care facilities, or paying a generous bonus.

An example from Meyer and Allen (1990) explained that parents who stressed to their offspring the importance of remaining loyal to one employer could set the stage for normative commitment. Additionally, an obligation to continue a generational line of employment with one employer could pressure an employee to be more normatively committed to the organization than remaining because they believed in its mission and values. Some nonprofit employees can feel obligation to their employers because they could have once been recipients of their services at one time in their lives.

Various scholars have considered normative commitment to be very similar in meaning to affective commitment (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). However, normative commitment places more emphasis on the employee's feelings of obligation to continue to work for the organization. This feeling can be tied to the employee's understanding of the stated mission, goals, and values. In comparison, affective commitment is based on an employee's emotional attachment to a company or organization based on different levels of positive feelings of the employee for the company. These organizational commitments are similar, yet many scholars argue that the subtle differences require separate places on the organizational commitment model (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

Wiener and Vardi (1980) suggested that normative commitment is a feeling of obligation, but added that normative commitment is only natural due to the way we are raised in society. Personal commitments to family and religion shed light on ways in which employees become personally committed to the goals of the organization. Allen & Meyer (1990) agreed that an employee exemplifying normative commitment indicates a

perceived commitment to stay employed in the organization. Subsequent research from Allen and Meyer (1997) revealed that normative commitment can occur when individuals' behaviors are reflected from the expectations placed upon them by people whose values they respect.

Contrary to normative commitment but in relation to tenure obligation, Grube (1990) did not find that the obligation commitment was particularly related to age, tenure, or career satisfaction. Grube (1990) further contended that individuals who choose to apply for a position with the organization might not always accept employment based on the nature of the job. Dunham, Grube and Castaneda (1994) stated:

Those whose norms indicated that it is inappropriate to leave an organization would be less likely to do so. Given the items used to measure normative commitment (e.g., "I think that people these days move from company to company too often"), it was also possible that overlap between the items used to measure normative commitment and those used to measure intent to leave could produce an observed correlation higher than the actual relationship between the two constructs. (p. 371)

Finegan (2000) contends that normatively committed employees do not always support the organization's values or vision. These employees are more interested in how they will fill their commitment through obedience and obligation to the organization.

Chen and Franceso (2003) note that these obligations may hold true not only for the organization but also for such things as a union or a particular political interest.

Finally, normative commitment is based upon the concept that one has an obligation to make a work-based decision to remain with an organization. Based on the work of Scholl (1981) and Wiener (1982), Meyer & Allen (1991) deduced that normative commitment further develops when an employee (a) has internalized a set of norms concerning appropriate conduct; and/or (b) is the recipient of benefits and experiences a

need to reciprocate. Meyer, Allen and Topolnytsky (1998) argue that normative commitment might be related to employees' recognition of their obligation within the psychological contract (Rousseau & Greller, 1994), which is perceived to be in effect with the organization (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

Summary

The literature review presents an overview of nonprofit organizations, their employees, the importance of the mission, and organizational commitment. There is very little research exploring the relationship between attachment to the mission and organizational commitment. Most studies show the relationship between mission attachment and job satisfaction and/or retention (Kim & Lee, 2003). Brown and Yoshioka (2004) studied how employees' attitudes toward the organization's mission relate to their satisfaction and the extent to which their attitudes toward the mission influence their decision to stay.

Glasrud (2001) contends that most researchers would agree that many organizations would benefit from emphasizing their mission and ways in which it relates to the organization and its employees. Additionally, Brown and Yoshioka (2004) report that "given its significant and fundamental role relatively little is known about how missions are perceived by employees and how those perceptions relate to other organizational attitudes (e.g., satisfaction) and behaviors (e.g., turnover)" (p. 8). The literature can only present the theories and significance of organizational commitment and its effect on employees' intent to remain with the organization, but organizations must become cognizant of what is needed in order to fulfill not only organizational needs but also employees' expectations. If organizations are serious about retaining valued

human capital, they must educate themselves to understand whether employees are attached to the mission and at what level of commitment they work toward mission-centered goals.

Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology of the study, the data collection, and the research design to be used in exploring mission attachment and organizational commitment. The results of the study will be presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore mission attachment and organizational commitment among nonprofit employees.

Recruiting and retaining highly performing employees is crucial to any organization. The ability to understand employees and their “psychological contract” with an organization can assist leaders in developing retention strategies to further understand what influences a nonprofit employee to remain with the organization. Ideally, these research findings should better establish a need to understand the commitment relationships that exist between employee and employer.

Chapter 3 will present the research method and appropriate design used for describing organizational commitment and mission attachment among nonprofit employees. The overview discusses: (a) research design; (b) sample/population; (c) data collection; (d) data analysis; (e) validity and reliability; and (f) ethical considerations.

Research Design

A research design resembles a blueprint that aids in fulfilling objectives and answering questions (Cooper and Schindler, 2006). Robson (2002) suggests that a good research design contains the following components. (1) Purpose (What is the study trying to achieve?); (2) Theory (What theory will guide your study?); (3) Research questions (To what questions is the research geared to providing answers?); (4) Methods (What techniques will be used to collect data?); and (5) Sampling strategy (From whom will data be gathered). A more qualitative research method allowed the researcher to focus on perceptions and emotional feelings of the participants, which would assist them in

describing the level of commitment and attachment to the mission. A quantitative research method using a standardized survey would only allow the researcher to gather data that have been reduced to numbers instead of words, which will not allow the meaningful findings that can only be expressed in words.

Qualitative phenomenological research was the most appropriate method for this exploratory study due to the focus it placed on the subjective experiences and emotions of each voluntary participant. Answer to questions such as “What does the mission mean? What type of attachment does the individual have to the mission? What is their commitment level to an organization and why?” are unique, and have emotional or psychological attachment to each individual that can be better answered with verbal responses.

According to Robson (2002) phenomenological research “is an approach which has much to offer in answering certain kinds of research question about subjective experience which may be highly relevant to some real world studies” (p. 196). All of the participants in the study were offered the opportunity to answer questions based on their own personal perceptions and experiences with the organization once they met the inclusion criteria.

Qualitative research has value when exploring more complex and sensitive issues (Robson, 2002). Additionally, qualitative research can be valuable when the topic has little or no research done in the specific area (Creswell, 2002). The qualitative data collected through the interviews allowed the researcher to encapsulate those emotionally driven responses that could not be described in a quantitative study with statistically

defined data (Robson, 2002). The study gave participants a voice, and it allowed data to be collected for future research in this area.

In this exploratory study, the researcher attempted to fill a gap in prior studies where a qualitative methodology approach had not been utilized to describe employees' organizational commitment and attachment to the mission in relationship to their intent to remain with the organization. The findings of this study can assist nonprofit HR professionals and organizational leaders in better understanding how employees are attached to their mission and the level of organizational commitment that may influence their retention and tenure with the organization.

Sample/Population

The nonprofit affiliate of a Southeast U.S.-based organization of approximately 8,000 regular full-time employees was the population for this study. The affiliate nonprofit organization has approximately 96 employees who work in one specific geographical area. The purposes of this affiliate division are to lead campaigns and lobby to influence policies, laws, and regulations that further the overall mission of the organization. The employees within this division do have a dedication to and in-depth knowledge of the mission to articulate aggressively the importance of the mission to local, state, and federal officials to explain ways laws and political decisions can influence the ability to obtain stated mission initiatives.

The sample for this study included management and non-management employees below director level. The inclusion criteria required that the employee work for the affiliate nonprofit organization, be a regular full-time employee, and hold a job title

below the director's level. Employees working less than full-time were not included due to the short contingencies placed on their employment contracts.

Employees below the director's level are those who are leading the campaigns and talking with elected officials in an effort to influence thoughts or votes in areas that can positively affect the organization's mission. In order for congressional members to understand the significance of the mission, this group of employees should be able to demonstrate their attachment and commitment on behalf of internal stakeholders. Bart and Tabone (1998) point out that mission becomes more than what is presented in a statement when those who support it put words into action.

The method of sampling was a purposive sample based on probability and non-probability characteristics, meaning each person solicited had an equal opportunity to be included given the specific inclusion criteria previously stated and his or her voluntary consent to participate. A purposive sampling allowed this particular group of people in the organization to be targeted. This method supported Robson's (2002) suggestion that a sample is a defined collection from the population.

It can be difficult to determine whether a predefined number of observations and interviews are needed for a sample in a qualitative study (Robson, 2002). The sample size should relate, in some proportion, to the size of the population targeted (Cooper & Schindler, 2006; Robson, 2002). Cooper and Schindler explain, "When the size of the sample exceeds five percent of the population, the limits of the population constrain the sample size need" (p. 435). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) support a sample size of five to 15 participants as a sufficient sample for a phenomenological study. The researcher was given a list of employees, only from the subset of the population targeted, with names,

titles, work locations, e-mail addresses, and office telephone numbers. The researcher used this list to solicit the population until 20 participants consented to participate in the study, provided they met the required inclusion criteria.

Data Collection

Written permission was secured from the president of the affiliate nonprofit organization to allow the researcher to conduct this study. Once the study was approved, a roster containing information such as employees' job titles, e-mail addresses, work locations, and telephone numbers was given to the researcher by the human resources business partner who supported the organization.

Data was received from participants by telephone interviews due to the geographical distance of the work location from that of the researcher. Robson (2002) contends that one major advantage to telephone interviewing is the ability to reach participants who are geographically scattered (Robson, 2002). Additionally, travel expenses and varied work schedules of the participations would have made face-to-face interviews difficult and too expensive for the researcher.

Prior to conducting the telephone interviews, a signed informed-consent release form was secured from each participant. To ensure anonymity and preserve confidentiality, an alpha-numeric pseudonym was assigned to each participant. Taking this extra step allowed participants to be identified by a letter and a number, which decreased the chance of any identifiable information that would connect the participant to the study.

The interviews were audio-taped for accuracy and later transcribed and analyzed using an inductive thematic approach to identify recurrent patterns and common themes.

Robson (2002) supported the use of a tape recording to allow the researcher to concentrate on the participants' responses during the interview. This method allowed the researcher to focus on interviewing the participants rather than note taking. In addition, the recording allowed for an accurate permanent record of the conversation. The overall goal was to record accurate data that captured the participants' experiences and emotional responses to semi-structured questions rather than to produce statistical summary capturing results from a quantitative survey.

Each participant was asked semi-structured, open-ended questions adapted from the Organizational Commitment Scale Questionnaire by Allen and Meyer (1990) (Appendix B) to describe their organizational commitment. Before the study, the researcher acquired a license that authorized the use of the TCM Employee Commitment Survey, which contained rights to Allen and Meyer (1990) Organizational Commitment Scale Questionnaire. Additionally, the researcher acquired permission from Dr. Meyer to adapt the quantitative statements to qualitative open-ended questions. Participants were also asked semi-structured, open-ended questions from the Mission Awareness Questionnaire by Brown and Yoshioka (2003) to describe their attachment and contributions to the mission. The semi-structure allows the researcher to have more autonomy to ask questions out of sequence in order to explore a topic more broadly (Cooper & Schlinder, 2006).

Brown and Yoshioka (2003) created four mission attachment statements to investigate employees' attitudes toward the mission in a youth and recreation services organization. The coefficient alpha reliability estimate was alpha .76. In addition, the Three Component Model by Allen and Meyer (1990) produced coefficient alpha

reliability estimates for the Affective Commitment Scale .87, Continuance Commitment Scale .75, and Normative Commitment Scale .79. The median reliability that was shown exceeds the reliability the median reliability of .70.

Since these two instruments presented quantitative reliability estimates, statements from these instruments were adapted to formulate qualitative semi-structured interview questions for this study. Additionally, Campbell (1996) added that consistency or reliability can be achieved when verified through the examination of collected data items, such as process notes and raw data that establish the trustworthiness of the research. To obtain accurate notes, all data from the participants were audio-recorded to prevent missed information, which may occur when only note-taking is utilized.

To increase the quality of the research, a measurement tool with a record of success in reliability and validity is advisable (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Creswell (2005) proposes that using an instrument that is reliable and meaningful can allow the researcher to draw conclusions from the sample studied. However in qualitative research, “the researcher is the instrument” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). The researcher has over 15 years of experience in conducting a variety of interviews and facilitating focus groups in a number of job-related positions. Interview training through the workplace and other related continuing education classes has allowed the researcher to become competent in conducting interviews and extracting recorded data to find various patterns and trends intended for report compilation.

Data Analysis

The research data from this exploratory study was obtained from telephone interview questions adapted by the researcher from the Organizational Commitment

Scale Questionnaire by Allen and Meyer (1990) (Appendix B) and the Mission Attachment Statements by Brown and Yoshioka (2003) (Appendix C). The questions from the Organizational Commitment Scale came from all three components of the scales: affective, continuance, and normative.

The manual analysis of the transcribed data used an inductive thematic approach to detect similarities of patterns, recurrent core themes, and common terms to categorize the participants' interview responses. Transcription of the individuals' responses was coded and clustered in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet relevant to common expressions, patterns, and themes identified by each participant to allow data to be filtered according to each section. Cooper and Schindler (2006) explained that the thematic approach allows "higher-level abstractions inferred from the text and its context" (p. 449). Analyzing the common terms, patterns, and themes offered a greater awareness of the question under exploration.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are extremely important in any research study, but they are especially important in a qualitative study. There is great concern among qualitative researchers about reporting accurate data. Much concern has to do with researchers creating or manufacturing anything they have not observed or seen (Huberman & Miles 2002). By audio- recording what the participants said in reference to their feelings and experiences, as distinguished from the researcher injecting any biases, validity can be established.

A phenomenological study can establish descriptive validity, which is what is truthfully stated through participants' interviews (Maxwell, 1992). Audio-taping the

participants' conversations and transcribing their responses ensured accuracy and prevented omission or distortion of valuable data. Information was transcribed verbatim from the words of each recorded participant. Also, the design of the research questions allowed for interpretive validity that relied on the participants' own words and concepts (Maxwell 1992).

Reliability is another concern in a qualitative research study, although it is a term which has been predominantly used in the area of quantitative research. However, qualitative researchers' reliability lies in the area of credibility. According to Bowen (2008), "credibility refers to the confidence one has in the truth of the findings" (p. 215). Additionally, qualitative researchers are mostly concerned with the study of participants' lived experiences that are expressed in words and expressions that raise concerns in reference to the reliability of the data collected. To address these concerns, Labuschagne (2003) reports that the "reliability criterion for qualitative research focuses on identifying and documenting recurrent accurate and consistent (homogenous) or inconsistent (heterogeneous) features as patterns, themes, world views, and any other phenomena under study in similar or different human contexts" (p. 8).

Reliability or credibility can be established by conducting a field study. A field study allowed the researcher to closely examine the interview questions to determine the clarity of the questions and time allotment needed for the proposed interview before it was conducted. Conducting the field study prior to the actual study allowed the researcher to know whether the method of data collection made sense and could lead to answering the research question.

The field study required the participants to be knowledgeable professionals within specialized areas who could determine if the proposed instrument could be used to improve validity. With the consent of the participants, the researcher chose two organizational development managers and one training consultant for the test. All three managers had several years of experience in conducting various types of interviews, training, and tests within their organizations. Two of the employees had master's degrees in organizational development. Neither one of the managers was employed with the affiliate organization or a part of the sample, but they did share the same characteristics as those to be sampled in the study. Additionally, all of their positions fell under the director's level.

A few suggestions were given by the managers and incorporated into the questions composed by the researcher to avoid any confusing or awkward questions during the actual interviews. One manager answered all the questions in 40 minutes, and the others completed the interview in 50 to 55 minutes. The average time taken for the interviews was approximately 48 minutes. All managers agreed that 60 minutes was adequate and reasonable time for others to answer the questions without feeling rushed.

Epoché

Epoché is a process that allows the researcher to set aside all preconceived ideas about what is being experienced and described by the participants. The elimination or purging of these preconceived ideas from the researcher allows the data to be more valid and remove the chance of skewing the results from the study. Moustakas (1994) suggests that researchers make use of the process before analyzing any data. Several epoché methods such as journaling and self-reflections have been used to record a researcher's

thoughts and ideas before or during the study (Moustakas, 1994). To remove any biases, the researcher used an epoché process documenting her self-reflection and preconceptions (Appendix D) before the start of the study.

Ethical Considerations

One major ethical concern in any study is the involvement of human subjects (Miles & Huberman 1994). Participants were selected on a voluntary basis for this study. Voluntary participants in the research study were properly informed about the intent of the study and their guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality. Each participant who volunteered and met the inclusion criteria was asked to sign an informed consent form prior to the interview.

To maintain anonymity, an alpha-numeric pseudonym was assigned to each participant. To preserve confidentiality, the researcher asked each participant to choose an area where he or she felt comfortable to talk freely. Taking this step allowed the participants to gain more of a sense of security.

All data or information stored on the researcher's home computer hard drive has been protected by a password accessible only to the researcher. A backup copy stored on a USB drive, along with all audio recordings, transcripts, and informed consent documents pertaining to this study, remain with the researcher safely secured in a home safe and will be destroyed after seven years.

Summary

The goal of this exploratory qualitative phenomenological study was to obtain data to describe nonprofit employees' organizational commitment and mission attachment in relationship to their intent to remain with the organization. Data collected

can allow nonprofit leaders and human resource professionals a better understanding of psychological factors regarding employees' attachment to the mission and their commitment to the organization. Employees who have a clear attachment to the mission are better equipped to articulate the specific needs of the organization to political lobbyists who can make a difference in laws for the betterment of the population served.

Through the development of questions adapted from the Organizational Commitment Scale Instrument from Meyer and Allen (1990) and the Mission Attachment Statements from Brown and Yoshioka (2003), analysis of the qualitative data collected described employees' attachment and desired commitment that led to their desire to remain with the organization. The results from this data attempted to fill a gap in the literature, which has not used the Organizational Commitment Scale and the Mission Attachment Statements in a qualitative study to explore mission attachment and organizational commitment.

Chapter 4 describes the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 offers a summary and discussion of the findings of the study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore mission attachment and organizational commitment among nonprofit employees.

Recruiting and retaining highly performing employees is crucial to any organization. The ability to understand employees and their “psychological contract” with an organization can assist leaders in developing retention strategies to further understand what influences a nonprofit employee to remain with the organization. Ideally, these research findings will better establish a need to understand the commitment relationships that exist between employee and employer.

In an effort to thoroughly explore mission attachment and organizational commitment among nonprofit employees, this study utilized the work of Allen and Meyer’s (1990) Organizational Commitment Scale, because of its importance in understanding the levels of organizational commitment. Data collection from studies using Allen and Meyer’s (1990) Organizational Commitment Scales was originally derived by using a quantitative seven-point Likert scale instrument. However, qualitative data collection was gathered for this study from open-ended semi-structured interview questions adapted from the statements used in the Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitment Scales. Utilizing an interview approach allowed participants the opportunity to provide verbal responses which can convey more true to life emotions and experiences.

This chapter contains the descriptive data, the data analysis, the results of the qualitative data analysis including the overarching themes which addresses the research

question associated with the study, and a summary of the chapter. The research question associated with this study was as follows:

How do employees describe their commitment to their organization and attachment to the mission in relationship to their intent to stay?

Descriptive Data

This section of the chapter provides the descriptive data for the study. A total of 20 management and non-management employees below director level were included in this study, and were interviewed by the researcher. However, prior to conducting the telephone interviews, a signed informed-consent release form was secured from each participant. To ensure anonymity and preserve confidentiality, an alpha-numeric pseudonym was assigned to each participant. Taking this extra step allowed participants to be identified only by a letter number and decreased the chance of any identifiable information.

The demographic composition of the research sample is provided in Table 1. The results indicate that the sample was primarily female (75%), and the years of experience ranged from 1 month to more than 11 years, with (95%) of the participants having 10 years of service or less. The results also indicate that the type of positions represented by the participants in this study was diverse. Participants were least likely to be income development managers (10%) and mostly likely to be grassroots specialists, specialists, or assistants (20%).

Table 1***Demographic Description of the Research Sample***

Source	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	15	75%
Male	5	25%
Service years		
1 month - 5 years	10	50%
6 years - 10 years	9	45%
11 years or more	1	5%
Positions		
Grassroots specialists	4	20%
Specialists	4	20%
Income development manager	2	10%
Relations managers	3	15%
Assistants	4	20%
Specialty manager	3	15%

Data Analysis Procedures

The research data from this exploratory study were obtained from telephone interview questions adapted by the researcher from the Organizational Commitment Scale Questionnaire by Allen and Meyer (1990) (Appendix B) and the Mission Attachment Statements by Brown and Yoshioka (2003) (Appendix C). The questions

from the Organizational Commitment Scale came from all three components of the scales: affective, continuance, and normative.

The manual analysis of the transcribed data was conducted by an inductive thematic approach to detect similarities of patterns, recurrent core themes, and common terms to categorize the participants' interview responses. Transcription of the individuals' responses were coded and clustered relevant to common expressions, patterns, and themes identified by each participant in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where the data were filtered according to each section. Cooper and Schindler (2006) explained that the thematic approach allows "higher-level abstractions inferred from the text and its context" (p. 449). Analyzing the common terms, patterns, and themes offered a greater awareness of the question under exploration.

Creswell (2009) outlines six steps that are involved in the qualitative data analysis process, which begin with the transcription of the data, and include the coding process and the generation of themes. The first step involves the organization and preparation of the data for analysis. For example, the transcription of the data into a Microsoft Word document helped to organize and prepare the data for analysis.

The second step consisted of reviewing all of the responses and getting a general sense of the data, where special attention was paid to the overall meaning and the tone of the responses, the credibility, and the depth of the information. In this process, key words and phrases were identified and typed into the document in red font next to the participants' response.

The third step involved the generation of a coding scheme, which was created based on the participants' responses. For example, Creswell (2009) explains that coding

is the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information. During this coding process, similar responses were given a qualitative explanatory code, which created the initial categories.

The next step consisted of using the coding process to develop a description of the context, which resulted in the assembly of the themes or categories. According to Creswell (2009), “description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting.” Once descriptions were assigned, the coding results were evaluated in an effort to create a practical list of themes. The identified themes represented the major findings for this research study. The themes were then weighted by totaling the number of responses aligned to each theme using Microsoft Excel, and the results were provided in a table for a descriptive summary

The fifth step consisted of determining how the descriptions of the themes would be represented in narrative form. According to Creswell (2009), the most popular approach consists of providing narrative passages in order to convey the general findings that emerged from the data analyses. The findings may include a discussion of events in chronological order, a detailed discussion of several themes, or a discussion of the inter-relationships between themes. For the purposes of this study, the researcher provided a detailed discussion of the themes and identified potential inter-relationships.

The final stage consisted of providing an interpretation of the data, where the data analysis findings were given meaning. Creswell (2009) explains that the “interpretation in qualitative research can take many forms”. Since the study focused on employees’ commitments to their organization and attachment to the mission, themes relating to those concepts served as the unit of analysis when interpreting the data.

Findings

This section of the chapter provides the data analysis results. Each interview question was analyzed individually, the themes and supporting narratives were provided for each interview question, and then the overall interview data analysis results were integrated in order to address the research question associated with this study.

The first interview question asked “Why did you pursue job opportunities with this nonprofit organization?” The coded responses from the interviews are presented in Table 2. The results indicate that the main response category was that the participant believes in the mission of the organization. Other responses that repeated themselves include the fact that the job was a good opportunity, the participant wanted to make a difference, the participant was passionate about the work, a personal tragedy was the inspiration, such as a family member dying from cancer, and the participant started out as a temporary employee or an intern first.

As indicated in Table 2, there were several reasons for pursuing the job. One response that incorporates a combination of these reasons is provided in the quote below:

I interned with this organization during college and was very interested in pursuing a full-time job with them after graduation. The organization has a mission that I am personally passionate about. I studied public relations in college and the media team here provided me opportunities to work on an issue that I am passionate about. I already knew the team members and I knew I worked well with them I was also interested in working for a nonprofit because I thought I would have more of a direct impact on the people I was trying to help.

Another employee indicated that her motivating factor was the loss of her brother due to cancer. She said “That made a large impact on me, and I wanted to do everything I could to find a cure for cancer in my lifetime. “

Table 2***Coded Responses for Interview Question One***

Coded responses	Frequency	Percent
Belief in mission	6	30%
Good opportunity	4	20%
Want to make a difference	4	20%
Passionate about the work	3	15%
Personal tragedy (e.g. family member with cancer)	3	15%
Started out as a temp or an intern	3	15%
Right fit	1	5%
Right time	1	5%
Commute is short	1	5%
Non-profit is appealing	1	5%
More flexible work conditions	1	5%
Needed a new job	1	5%
Background in non-profit	1	5%
Followed a former administrator	1	5%
Was referred by a former co-worker	1	5%
Great job portfolio	1	5%
Interested in Public Health implementation	1	5%
Opportunity for growth	1	5%
Non-profit has a direct impact	1	5%
Was downsized at previous company	1	5%

From this list of codes, four major themes emerged, which are presented in Table 3. The first theme indicates that some participants had an intrinsic motivation such as a passion for their field, or a personal drive to make a difference. In some cases, the personal drive was a consequence of a personal tragedy, such as a death in the family due to cancer. The second theme represents situational factors that were unrelated to the job itself, such as needing a new job, following a former administrator, or having been downsized at a previous company. The third theme represents factors such as participants' prior positive experiences with the organization or positive aspects or expectations about the job itself, such as the work conditions being more flexible, the quality of the job portfolio, or the length of the commute. The final theme indicates that 30% of the participants pursued the position in the organization specifically due to the mission of the organization.

Table 3

Themes for Interview Question One

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Intrinsic motivations	11	55%
Situational factors unrelated to the job itself	11	55%
Positive experiences or aspects of the job itself	10	50%
Belief in mission	6	30%

The second interview question asked “What is your understanding of the mission of this nonprofit organization?” The coded responses in Table 4 indicate that when asked about the mission of their organization, participants were most likely to mention

advocacy, followed by saving lives, curing cancer, and providing comprehensive services to cancer patients. It is important to note that many of the participants mentioned more than one factor. Also, some of these coded responses were inter-related. For example, curing cancer saves lives, and providing comprehensive services improves lives.

Table 4

Coded Responses for Interview Question Two

Coded responses	Frequency	Percent
Advocacy	9	45%
Save lives	8	40%
Cure cancer	5	25%
Provide comprehensive services	4	20%
Improve lives	3	15%
Make cancer research a top national priority	2	10%
Educate	2	10%
Prevent cancer	2	10%
Cancer research	2	10%
Treat cancer	1	5%
Access to affordable care	1	5%
Promote awareness	1	5%
Early diagnosis	1	5%

Based on the inter-relationships of the coded responses, three major themes emerged, and they are listed in Table 5. The results in Table 5 indicate that 80% of the participants provided a response consistent with the mission of saving lives. In addition,

many of them mentioned factors related to advocacy, and improving lives as being part of the mission of their organization. Furthermore, it is clear that all three of these themes are related because advocacy helps to improve and save lives. Therefore the responses were highly consistent for this interview question. For example, one of the participants stated the following:

As I understand it, this organization would love to cure cancer, but understands the challenges of a goal that big. In the meantime, they want to make the lives of cancer patients better in medicine, research, patient rights, insurance, and quality of life.

Table 5

Themes for Interview Question Two

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Saving lives	16	80%
Advocacy	13	65%
Improving lives	7	35%

Interview question three asked “From your personal experience, how do you feel that your work contributes to carrying out the mission of this nonprofit organization?” The participants provided more detailed responses to this particular question. Several quotes are provided in order to represent the depth of the responses and to provide a context from which the themes emerged.

The coded responses are provided in Table 6. The results indicate that the most common response pertained directly to advocacy. Some participants specifically mentioned the word advocacy while others provided examples of advocacy. For example, one participant said “It certainly contributes to carrying out the mission because

my job is to work with the state and local campaigns. We need to ensure that every state becomes smoke-free so that we can expedite the process of eradicating cancer. “

Another participant provided a detailed account of how her advocacy work contributes to carrying out the mission of the organization. Her explanation is provided below:

Since I am a member of the media team, I am responsible for helping to deliver our message to external audiences. My team is the direct link between the work that is being done in our office to the audience we want to hear our messages. I personally work on social media and advertising efforts at this organization. By placing ads and being vocal on social networks, I am helping to create buzz around the issue of cancer advocacy and I am connecting with lawmakers, reporters and volunteers alike.

An example from a participant who indicated that her work contributes to carrying out the mission of the organization by advancing the mission and directing patients to the proper services, is provided below:

I manage those who work directly with potential patients as they start the relationship with this organization. It is my department’s job to discuss the mission of the organization during the initial meetings with the patients. Afterwards I make sure that the patients were directed to the right department for services. I am the initial or first line of assistance for those who seek help from the organization.

There were two participants who indicated that their work supports the mission given that they provide support to those who work directly with the patients. For example, one of the participants explained the following:

My duties as an executive assistant are important to me and my role for the mission of the organization. It makes me feel that the paper work I manage, the meetings scheduled, the appointments arranged, the travel that is booked and other things all contributes to the staff accomplishing important goals and valuable decision-making at meetings. If the meetings to collaborate are not scheduled, paper work not correct, travel not booked, it becomes harder to fulfill the critical assignments to help the lives of people like this organization is designed to do.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the one participant who indicated that her personal work has had no great impact with regard to carrying out the mission of the organization was one of the participants who provided a situational reason for pursuing the job; she was referred by a former co-worker. Therefore her pursuit of the job was not mission or cause driven.

Table 6

Coded Responses for Interview Question Three

Coded responses	Frequency	Percent
Provide advocacy	6	30%
Grassroots organizer	2	10%
Advance mission	2	10%
Raise money for services	2	10%
Support staff who help patients	2	10%
Direct patients to proper services	1	5%
Train staff who help patients	1	5%
Contributes indirectly	1	5%
Greatest impact – prevention	1	5%
Handle financial matters	1	5%
No great impact	1	5%
Data analysis to be data informed	1	5%

The themes that emerged from these coded response are featured in Table 7. The results indicate that the coded responses resulted in three themes, which include advocacy-related work, administrative work, and fund raising activities.

Table 7

Themes for Interview Question Three

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Advocacy (campaigning, promoting mission)	9	45%
Administrative work (train, support, manage)	3	15%
Fund raising	2	10%

The next interview question asked “From your experience, how would you describe your level of contentment in working for this nonprofit organization because you personally believe in its mission and values?” The coded responses outlined in Table 8 indicate that there were really two distinct themes that emerged, which support the fact that participants are content or very content working at the organization and their contentment is primarily driven by the mission of the organization. In fact, 90% of the participants provided responses showing that they are content or very content, and 70% of the participants specifically mentioned the mission of the organization as a contributing factor.

An example from one of the participants, which pertains to how the mission of the organization is a contributing factor to employee contentment, is provided below:

I enjoy the work that I do for the organization. My understanding of the disease and how it affects not just the patient but the family has opened up my world. When I first started with the organization, I had no first-hand experience with any cancer patients. I can now say I have interacted with Children at various camps, help a patient chose a donated wig, and volunteered and walked in several events. I fully believe in the mission of this organization and what it stands for.

Similarly, another participant stated “I am totally content with working here. I love the mission and believe in what we do here. I could not see myself working for another organization.”

The results in Table 8 also indicate that there were several of additional reasons why participants were content with their job at the organization. For example, one participant explained “I am content because not only have I grown as a person since working here, but I have grown as a professional. The mission of this organization helps you grow up pretty quickly.” Another participant stated “I am definitely content. This organization has allowed me so much flexibility to do my job, so I love it.”

One of the participants provided a detailed explanation as to why she is content.

Her explanation is presented below:

Words are not enough to explain the honor it is to be a part of such a vital organization that helps save lives every day, support the families and fight for a cure so others may not suffer from such a terrible disease. Every law that is changed because of what our organization contributes by speaking on behalf of the people who suffer from this disease is invaluable to measure.

Finally, two participants had dissenting responses given that they said that they were not content with their job at the organization. For example, one of the participants explained “I do not feel content at all. I have seen how the organization takes care of certain communities and people outside of the organization, but do a poor job of attracting and retaining good employees.” This participant was the same person who stated that she has made “no great impact” while working at the organization.

Table 8***Coded Responses for Interview Question Four***

Coded responses	Frequency	Percent
Content or very content	18	90%
Contentment driven by mission	14	70%
Organization put trust in participant	1	5%
Content with personal performance	1	5%
Grown personally and professionally	1	5%
Enjoy the work	1	5%
Can results of one's own work	1	5%
Less content than expected due to organizational policies	1	5%
Honored to be part of the organization	1	5%
Not content - poor recruitment & retention of good people	1	5%
Have a lot of flexibility to do the job	1	5%
Love everything about the organization	1	5%

The three themes that emerged from the coded responses are featured in Table 9.

The results indicate that employee contentment was a result of being driven by the organizational mission, and or by personal experiences while working at the organization, such as seeing the results of one's own work, satisfaction with personal performance, and personal and professional growth. However, there were two participants who were not content, and therefore the third theme pertained to a lack of contentment with one's job at the organization.

Table 9

Themes for Interview Question Four

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Contentment driven by mission	14	70%
Contentment driven by personal experiences on the job	8	40%
Not content	2	10%

The fifth interview question asked “From your experience, how would you describe your level of emotional attachment to this nonprofit organization?” The coded responses presented in Table 10 indicate that 70% of the participants provided a response directly stating or suggesting that they are emotionally attached to the organization. However, four participants specifically stated that they were not personally or emotionally attached to the organization. Two of the three participants who said that they enjoyed working at the organization, did not indicate whether or not they were emotionally attached, and therefore those two participants make up the remaining of the participants who did not fall into the emotionally attached or not emotionally attached category.

Reasons that were given as to why participants were emotionally attached include personally experiencing the impact of cancer, being attached to the staff and volunteers, being attached to the nature of the work, and being attached to the mission or cause associated with the organization. An example from one of the participants who stated that she was very emotionally attached is provided below:

I would say that I am very emotionally attached. I have lost family and friends to cancer, so I am very attached to this organization and the

research that is done here to combat this awful disease. As I stated before, I continue to volunteer in activities to further support the mission.

Another participant explained “My emotional level is very strong because not only do I witness the level of commitment of co-workers, but I also hear stories of survival and triumph. “

Table 10

Coded Responses for Interview Question Five

Coded responses	Frequency	Percent
Emotionally attached/passionate	14	70%
Not personally/emotionally attached	4	20%
Attached due to personal impact of cancer	3	15%
Enjoy working at the organization	3	15%
Attached to the staff and volunteers	3	15%
Attached to the nature of the work	3	15%
Attached to the cause/mission	2	10%
Attached given how hard they fight to advocate	1	5%
Chose to be emotionally detached	1	5%
Somewhat emotionally attached	1	5%
Not emotionally attached due to supervisory issues	1	5%
Attachment level weakened due to new direct manager	1	5%

Of greater interest were the reasons that participants gave for not being emotionally attached. For example, one of the participants indicated that she was intentionally trying to detach herself emotionally from the organization. Her explanation was as follows:

I am not very attached to this organization emotionally. When I think about it, I liken my work experience to dating. I had a bad relationship with a different organization before I started working here and that relationship is keeping me from really buying in fully to my new relationship – although I have been here for several years. I am just not interested in investing a lot of emotion into this job right now.

One of the participants was not emotionally attached due to management-related issues, and another participant said that her attachment had been weakened due to management issues. For example, the first participants stated “I am a new employee with the organization. I would have to say due to supervisory issues, my emotional attachment is very low.” The second participant provided the following explanation:

My emotional attachment to the organization was greater when my work role was more directly aligned with the mission and my manager was more emotionally attached to the people on the team. I believe my emotional attachment has changed as my direct manager changed. The current management style is drastically different from what I initially encountered when entering the organization.

Finally, one of the participants indicated that she was only somewhat emotionally attached, given her age and her personal-family life. Her explanation is provided below:

I am less emotionally attached to this job than I have been to jobs in my past. This is more a function of age, maturity and life circumstances than anything directly related to the job. At 22 years old, my job was my life and I was largely defined by my work and my co-workers were a significant portion of my social life. Now at 37, I am married with a child and my work has taken a smaller role in myself definition. It helps that this is a larger organization that allows for more personal privacy of its employees. I have found that smaller organizations tend to be rather insular with employees sharing a great deal of personal information with co-workers. I am no longer comfortable with that sort of thing and refrain from sharing my details of my home life. This is perfectly acceptable behavior here, which I prefer. That level of detachment means I could separate from the organization without tremendous emotional withdrawal, although I would continue to have feelings of affection for the organization and its employees.

The themes that emerged from the coded responses are outlined in Table 11. The results indicate that the overarching theme was to be emotionally attached due to the nature of the work, such as the mission, the cause or the job itself. Other themes include being emotionally attached due to the people at the organization, being emotionally attached based on past experiences with cancer (self, family or friends), and not being emotionally attached due to organizational reasons. Although only two participants provided a response supporting this fourth theme when responding to interview question five, the third participant provided a response to an earlier question that confirms her lack of satisfaction with the organization. Finally, although only one person indicated that she was only somewhat emotionally attached due to her family life and maturity, this response was categorized as a theme because it reflects a personal circumstance that tends to be relatively common with married women with children.

Table 11

Themes for Interview Question Five

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Emotionally attached due to nature of work/mission	9	45%
Emotionally attached due to the people	3	15%
Emotionally attached due to personal experience with cancer	3	15%
Not emotionally attached due to organizational reasons	3	15%
Somewhat emotionally attached due to family life	1	5%

The sixth interview question asked “From your personal experience and perception of this nonprofit organization, to what extent would you be happy spending

the rest of your career here?” The coded responses in Table 12 indicate that the most common response was to want to stay at the organization followed equally by wanting to retire at the organization and not being sure. Participants that were not sure indicated that they were still young and/or whether or not they stay at the organization depends on the opportunities that present themselves. Some participants said they probably won't stay or they definitely will not stay unless changes are made, such as a position change or a cultural change within the organization.

One of the participants provided a very detailed and articulate account of how her personal life has interacted with her work life at the organization resulting in her staying at the organization longer than she would have otherwise stayed. She also indicated that her current life situation requires an adjustment to her work life in order for her to stay at the organization. Her detailed response is provided below:

This is interesting timing for me to answer this question. I have working here for over 6 years. I was not planning on this being the last job of my career when I came on-board, and I have actually stayed longer than is probably wise from a career perspective since there is very little room for advancement within the organization. There have been points that would have been natural times to transition out of the organization, but I remained here for a number of reasons. At one point I was pregnant and knew that the maternity leave and family support policies here would be beneficial to me. At another time I was looking elsewhere, but I was within months of vesting employer paid pension, and my other investments were taking a hit due to market fluctuations, and I didn't feel like I could walk away from that benefit. I am at another good transition point because my husband has taken a new job that allows us great financial flexibility. I would probably be happy to stay with the organization if my position could be adjusted to part-time to allow me more time with my son and husband, and I am discussing this option before I present a plan to my supervisor. If there is no way to reduce my hours, this organization is no longer the right option for me and my family, and I will consider working elsewhere. In short, I will only work a job if that job is good for my family. If this job ceases to be good for my family, I will leave. My family trumps career and mission.

In order to provide some context for the reasons why participants said that they wanted to stay at their current organization for the remainder of their careers, a couple of direct quotes are provided. An example from one of the participants who indicated that she would like to stay at the organization is as follows:

After 5 years of working for this organization, I left to pursue a career in the private sector making more money. The joy that I had working for the organization was not at the private sector. After only 1 year, I returned back to this organization taking a pay cut because I felt that my duties and job working for the organization would be better used and my joy was back in what I was doing.

Similarly, another participant provided the following highly favorable response:

I am very, very happy this is the career I have been working towards in all my previous jobs. My personal experiences with other nonprofit organizations were minor compared to the life saving support of this organization. My perception is what we do really matters to everyone.

Table 12

Coded Responses for Interview Question Six

Coded responses	Frequency	Percent
Would like to stay at the organization	6	30%
Would love to retire at the organization	4	20%
Not sure	4	20%
Depends on opportunities	2	10%
Won't stay unless culture changes drastically	2	10%
Probably won't stay, still young	1	5%
Probably stay, depends who the direct boss is	1	5%
Would stay if could change current position	1	5%
Depends on flexibility; needs to reduce hours	1	5%

Table 13 provides the overall themes that resulted from the coded responses. The results indicate that 50% of the participants said that they want to stay at their current organization for the rest of their career. Forty percent of the participants said that whether or not they stay at the current organization depends on situational factors within the organization such as their job position, their direct boss, and opportunities within the company. Two participants indicated that it is unlikely they will remain at their current organization for the remainder of their career.

Table 13

Themes for Interview Question Six

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Would like to spend rest of career at current organization	10	50%
Depends on situational factors within the organization	8	40%
Probably won't stay/unlikely	2	10%

The next interview question asked participants to “Describe any costs impact for you if you decided to leave this nonprofit organization right now.” The coded responses outlined in Table 14 indicate that the most common response was to suffer a financial hit or loss with other participants indicating that it would result in financial devastation. Participants were also somewhat likely to specifically mention the loss of benefits. Interestingly, three of the participants stated that there would be no financial cost impact because they would only leave their current position if they were offered much more

money somewhere else. For example, one participant responded in the following manner:

I am not sure if I would answer this right, but if I did leave here, it would be only because I found another opportunity that would pay much, much more than what I make and would match the benefits and opportunities. I wouldn't think there would be any cost impact.

In addition, three participants indicated that there would be an emotional or personal satisfaction cost. For example, one of the participants stated "There would be the emotional costs because I would be leaving such a great group of people and such a powerful mission. The financial costs would be secondary for me."

There were also two participants who mentioned that they would be able to sustain themselves financially on a short-term basis. For example, one of these participants indicated the following:

I don't plan on leaving anytime soon. I am so loyal to my job that I would take a pay cut before I decide to leave. Financially I believe I would survive without work for about three months but I am good at finding a job when I need one.

In addition to financial and emotional costs, one of the participants indicated that a cost impact would be a tax on her time due to having to find a new job. For example, this participant explained "The cost impact is that it is challenging and time consuming to look for employment and another place to invest my time and energy professionally."

Finally, there was one completely unique response, which indicated that the only cost impact would be to the company itself. This participant explained "The only cost impact would be to the company because they would have to recruit to backfill my position, and in that time they may not be raising all the funds I currently raise in my role."

Table 14***Coded Responses for Interview Question Seven***

Coded responses	Frequency	Percent
Financial hit or loss	7	35%
Financial devastation	4	20%
Would lose some or all benefits	4	20%
Would only leave if making much more money	3	15%
Personal or emotional cost	3	15%
Would survive financially short-term	2	10%
The only cost would be to the company	1	5%
Depends on job market and cost of living	1	5%
Cost of time to find a new job	1	5%

The themes outlined in Table 15 indicate that the overarching theme was a financial impact due to a loss of salary, a loss of benefits, and/or a loss of retirement savings. However, an emotional or personal cost impact was cited by a smaller percentage with even less participants stating that there would be no impact to them (e.g., they would be making more money).

Table 15***Themes for Interview Question Seven***

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Financial impact (salary, benefits, retirement plan)	17	85%
Emotional/personal impact	4	20%
Probably no impact – probably making more money	3	15%

The next interview question asked “What impact does the scarcity of available job options have on your decision whether or not to leave this organization?” Table 16 provides a list of the coded responses. The results indicate that participants were most likely to say that the scarcity of available job options have no effect on their decision to stay at their current organization because they have no intent to leave. For example, one of the participants said “It really does not have a bearing because I want to be here.” Similarly, another participant explained “I do not feel this would be applicable to me because I really love my job and the wonderful people I work with and the organization’s mission.”

On the other hand, four participants stated that the job market has a significant effect on their decision to stay; although one participant said that it no longer has as much of an effect given that her husband now has a more financially secure position. For example, one of the participants explained “It is hard out there right now, so it definitely will play a part in me staying put for right now. I am not sure what I would do when more job opportunities become available.”

Three participants said that it has no effect on their decision to stay at their current organization because they believe that they would be able to get another job, although the job might have to be in the private sector. An example from one of the participants is provided below.

I do not feel that if I had to leave this organization that I would be out of work for very long. The job market is picking up not just in the private sector, but in other nonprofits, and my skills could be used in both.

Table 16
Coded Responses for Interview Question Eight

Coded responses	Frequency	Percent
Has no effect - I want to stay at this organization	11	55%
Has a significant effect on decision to stay	4	20%
Has no effect - I can get another job	3	15%
Incites some fear about losing current job	2	10%
Has a small effect on decision to stay	1	5%
There are minimal options in the nonprofit sector	1	5%

Based on the coded responses, two themes emerged, which are presented in Table 17. The predominant theme was that the scarcity of job options available has no effect on the participants' decision whether or not to leave the organization because they either want to stay where they are or they believe that they can get another job. The second theme was that the job market does have a significant effect on their decision to stay in their current organization.

Table 17
Themes for Interview Question Eight

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Has no effect on my decision to stay	14	70%
Has a significant effect on my decision to stay	4	20%

The ninth interview question asked participants to “Describe your desire and/or thoughts on continuing to work for this nonprofit organization and supporting its mission

for the next five years.” The coded responses in Table 18 indicate that 65% of the participants definitely want to stay for at least another five years, and several participants indicated a desire to advance within the organization. Two participants stated that the probability of them staying another five years depends on whether or not they have opportunities for advancement. For example, one of the participants provided the following response:

Development and opportunities for growth are very important to me as I am focused on growing in my career and applying my talents where they will be best utilized. It would bring me great joy to continue with the organization; however my current manager does not focus on development. I would be more likely to continue with the organization over the next five years if management was more committed to development mapping and role expansion.

Some of the reasons participants gave for wanting to stay include wanting to retire at the current organization, wanting to see all of the progress “play out”, there is more work to do, and they have a strong desire to achieve the mission of the organization. However, some participants were unsure about staying. For example, one of the participants said “I have a great ardent desire to be allowed to focus on the mission especially for populations that are not as currently involved in this effort. I am not sure about being here for the next five years.”

There were also a few participants who said that they probably won’t stay another five years, or that they will definitely not stay. The participant who said that he will not stay provided the following explanation:

I am almost certain that I will not be with this organization for five more years. I have been in the same position for over six years already, and I am mentally fatigued and bored. In addition, there are family concerns to address. While I support the mission, I feel that I have done a good part in

promoting it already, and do not feel obliged to stay here if it's not in the best interests of my family.

Table 18

Coded Responses for Interview Question Nine

Coded responses	Frequency	Percent
Wants and plans to stay for another 5 years	13	65%
Wants to advance in the organization	5	25%
Wants to retire at the organization	4	20%
There is more work to do	2	10%
Probably won't stay	2	10%
Depends on advancement opportunities	2	10%
Strong desire to stay and achieve mission	2	10%
Wants to see things all of the work come to fruition	1	5%
Wants to support the mission - if left, would volunteer	1	5%
Will stay if direct line of reporting stays the same	1	5%
Not sure about staying	1	5%
Will not stay	1	5%

The themes that emerged based on these coded responses are featured in Table 19.

The results indicate that the predominant theme was that participants plan to stay for at least another five years, followed by not being sure. However, there were three participants who said that they do not plan to stay another five years.

Table 19***Themes for Interview Question Nine***

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Plans to stay another 5 years	13	65%
Not sure about staying another 5 years	4	20%
Staying another 5 years is unlikely	3	15%

The last interview question asked participants to “Describe your thoughts on loyalty to this organization, and do you feel a sense of moral obligation to remain?” The coded responses in Table 20 indicate that the participants were most likely to say that they are loyal to the organization, but they are not morally obligated to stay at the organization.

Table 20***Coded Responses for Interview Question Ten***

Coded responses	Frequency	Percent
Employee is loyal to the organization	11	55%
Not morally obligated to stay at the organization	10	50%
Has a moral obligation due to the impact of cancer	3	15%
Moral obligation to the mission	3	15%
Not loyal to the organization	2	10%
Employee will continue to play a major role	1	5%
Longer tenure results in stronger commitment	1	5%
Obligated to God who helps to support mission	1	5%
Sense of loyalty and obligation have dwindled	1	5%

There were three people who did feel a moral obligation to stay at the organization. These participants were likely to say that the impact of cancer is so great and there is a need and moral obligation to help people. For example, one of the participants provided the following explanation:

The work we do here is important. I am very loyal to my job and the organization. I do have a sense of moral obligation due to the impact the disease had on my family. I would like to support and find a cure for this disease.

Three of the participants indicated that they have a moral obligation to the mission itself. For example, one of the participants provided the following response:

I believe that there are those who are loyal to this organization. I believe that this organization is making a difference in the lives of many people who are suffering from cancer. However, I don't feel an obligation to stay. I do feel a moral obligation to support the mission.

There were two participants whose responses suggest that they were not loyal to the organization or morally obligated to remain in their position at the organization. One of the participants said the following:

I don't feel a moral obligation to continue my work here. At some level, I actually feel the opposite, that perhaps the organization might be better served by vacating my position so that someone with greater passion and commitment could come in and inject new life into the organization. Whether I work here or not, the organization will thrive. My role is not crucial.

The other participant explained "I do not feel any loyal obligations to this organization. There are very few advancements available to anyone. That said, I also do not feel a moral obligation to remain." Therefore a lack of advancement opportunities appears to have made this particular employee bitter towards the organization.

The emergent themes outlined in Table 21 indicate that the majority of the participants have a sense of loyalty to the organization and/or the mission itself, but many of them do not feel morally obligated to stay at their current organization. Other less predominant themes indicate that there are some who do feel morally obligated to stay, and a few who are not loyal to the organization.

Table 21

Themes for Interview Question Ten

Themes	Frequency	Percent
Loyal to the organization and/or mission	13	65%
Not morally obligated to stay at the organization	10	50%
Morally obligated to stay	3	15%
Not loyal to the organization	2	10%

Key Overarching Themes

Throughout this study, interview questions pertaining to organizational commitment and mission attachment provided many common themes. However, three dominate themes were identified in varying degrees in the study. Table 22 provides the top three themes that emerged throughout the study based on the participants' responses. The results in Table 22 indicate that the most common theme related to the mission driven nature of the participants. The second most common theme pertained to the outcomes of the work performed, which included saving lives and improving quality of life. The third most common theme pertained to advocacy, which was one of the specific ways in which the participants in this study were able to save and improve lives.

Table 22

Overarching Themes

Overarching themes	Number of references throughout study
Mission driven	42
Save and improve lives	23
Advocacy	22

Mission Driven

The number one theme was the presence of the participants' reasons for joining the organization. The majority of the participants joined the organization and has remained at the organization due to the mission. For example, one of the participants stated:

I previously worked for the organization in another state and had to leave because there wasn't a position to transfer into where I relocated. I worked for another nonprofit for four months before applying, interviewing and accepting this position that I currently have, and I am very excited to be back. I definitely personally believe in its mission and values.

Another participant who returned to the organization stated:

After 5 years of working for this organization, I left to pursue a career in the private sector making more money. The joy that I had working for the organization was not at the private sector. After only 1 year, I returned back to this organization taking a pay cut because I felt that my duties and job working for the organization would be better used and my joy was back in what I was doing.

Even though these participants left the organization, they continued to look for opportunities so that they could return because they believed in the mission and values.

Their belief in the mission may have come from personal past experiences with cancer and/or the participants' sense of personal responsibility to help other people. However, it

is important to note that participants were not likely to feel that they had a personal or moral obligation to remain at the organization even if they said that they were driven by the mission.

Although the mission of the organization was a major driving factor in the recruitment and retention of the employees represented in this study, it is important to note that the mission was not the only factor, and was not a factor at all for some participants. For example, other reasons for joining the organization included a referral from a coworker or the simple fact that the opportunity for employment was made available. Some of the additional reasons for staying at the organization included the personal relationships that employees had with one another, financial demands, and/or due to the flexibility of the company and one's ability to balance work and family.

One of the contingencies of remaining at the organization for several of the participants pertained to organizational factors. For example, two of the participants said that whether or not they stayed at the organization depended on whether or not there was an opportunity for advancement. Therefore advancement within the organization was an important factor for several of the participants. In addition, six of the participants said that whether or not they stay depends on one or more of the following: (1) who their boss is, (2) the extent to which drastic cultural changes are made, (3) the position that they hold within the organization, and (4) the flexibility of the job.

While the mission of the organization was the most common reason that participants gave for joining and remaining at the organization, it was not the only reason. Furthermore, participants were more likely to say that the mission was their reason for joining the organization than they were for saying that it was the reason that they

remained at the organization. These findings imply that some participants may be attached to or driven by the mission itself and not necessarily the organization. Therefore, the participants may believe that they can serve the mission of the organization in other ways, either through volunteer work or by working at another organization that may be a better fit for their personal needs. Another possible implication is that some of the participants may not actually believe that the organization is aligned with its own mission, but they remain due to financial constraints and the state of the economy.

Saving and Improving Lives

The second most popular theme pertained to the actual results of the mission, which was saving lives and/or improving lives. One participant made this statement:

I have always wanted to work with an organization that helped people in some way. The timing for this opportunity for me was perfect, and I was excited to be accepted as part of a team that focused on helping people and saving lives.

Many other participants mentioned the need to want to work for this organization to make a difference in other lives. One other participant stated:

The mission of the organization is to help improve the lives of people with cancer as well as to find a cure through research. To me the mission is to first find out why some have cancer and find a way to cure them and also preserve their life while fighting the disease.

When employees understand the purpose of the mission and can connect to it in a way they feel they can make a difference, they are more attached to the mission and want to see the organization accomplish their goals (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003). However, not all of the participants believed that they were making a direct impact, which appears to be related to their desire to remain at the organization. For example, one of the participants

stated “I do not feel as though my role makes a great impact in the mission of the organization”. This participant also said that she was not content and not attached to the organization. Brown, Yoshioka and Munoz (2004) contend that attachment and fulfillment of the mission occurs when individuals feel satisfied with their work and the work they contribute toward organizational goals. Job description alignment and role adjustment to the mission could possibly improve employees’ feelings toward the work they do in relationship to the organization’s mission.

Advocacy

The actual results of the mission were achieved through the third most popular theme, which was advocacy. Advocacy is a great part of the organization’s mission because through advocacy, policy changes can be made which directly impact the clients that the participants serve within their organization. Through the participants’ responses, it seemed as though they clearly understood this goal. In one participant’s response it was stated:

The mission of this organization is to make cancer a top national priority with our lawmakers at the national, state and regional levels. This organization works to pass legislation that supports cancer patients. One of the ways we do this is by building a grassroots arm of passionate volunteers who believe in the power of advocacy to fight cancer.

Advocacy was mentioned in another participant’s response when stated:

This organization uses advocacy to promote policies at the state, local, and federal level that will lead to the elimination of cancer as a public health threat.

Consistent with the first two themes, the degree to which participants felt that they were actually having a direct impact (implementing the mission) and/or the degree to which they felt that they were attached to the mission versus the organization itself was

related to the degree to which they viewed themselves as advocates for their clients. For example, one of the participants explained “I am passionate about this organization because we fight so hard to advocate for such a great cause”. Another participant explained how her attachment to the organization has weakened since her role has changed given that she feels as if her role is not as well aligned with the mission, and she does not appear to be satisfied with her new direct manager . Her response was as follows:

My emotional attachment to the organization was greater when my work role was more directly aligned with the mission and my manager was more emotionally attached to the people on the team. I believe my emotional attachment has changed as my direct manager changed. The current management style is drastically different from what I initially encountered when entering the organization.

Summary

The results of this study indicate that employees tended to describe their commitment and attachment to the mission in terms of a passion for their work and a strong belief in the mission of the organization. However, there was a small portion of participants who have remained at the organization because of financial reasons and the current state of the job market, and not because they are committed to the organization or its mission.

The majority of the participants in this study appeared to be very strongly attached to and passionate about the organization’s mission, even to a greater extent than they were to the organization itself. Because of their passion as well as the relationships and experiences that they have had while working at the organization, and the characteristics of the job itself, the majority of the participants continue to work for the

organization, with many of them wishing to stay long term and possibly retire from their current organization. However, financial needs and organizational flexibility were also reasons for staying at the organization. In fact, in some cases, financial reasons were the driving force. Even in instances where the participant claimed that their commitment to the mission of the organization was the driving factor, there were still some participants who said that if they lost their job, they may not be able to get another job with the same financial benefits given the economy. Therefore the financial impact of losing the job resonated with some of the participants who claimed to be very committed to the mission of the organization only for that reason.

In the study, the majority of the participants said they felt a sense of loyalty to the organization, but they did not feel morally obligated to stay. Therefore the employees in this study tend to remain in their current position based on their attachment to the mission more so than due to any other reason. More so, their attachment to the mission is also due to personal experiences they or a family member have had with cancer, or simply because of the significance of the cause. Therefore, if employees begin to feel as if their organization is not fulfilling its mission and/or they believe that they can fulfill the mission under more ideal circumstances somewhere else, they may be very likely to leave the organization since their loyalty was more with the mission than the organization itself.

This chapter provided the data analysis results from the transcribed interviews and addressed the research question associated with the study. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of these findings and focuses on its implications. In addition, the limitations of the current study are discussed and recommendations for future research are provided.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter five presents a summary and discussion of the data analysis from the study along with recommendations for future research. Several tables were used in chapter four to illustrate summary information of demographics, coded responses, and themes pertaining to the collected data. Recommendations for future research are made to enhance the existing body of knowledge relating to organizational commitment and mission attachment in the nonprofit sector.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Moustakas (1994) contends that a phenomenological study attempts to understand people day-to-day life experiences and their understanding of the world in which they live. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine how nonprofit employees described their commitment and attachment to the mission in relation to their intent to remain with the organization.

One of the goals in this study was to develop semi-structured interview questions that could capture participants' responses to uncover true emotions and personal experiences. After transcribing the textual responses from the participants in response to various interview questions, an alignment with the literature was noted in the area of employees being committed to the organization on three different levels. Additionally, it was also noted that many carried a psychological contract unknown to the organization that could lead to greater attachment to the mission or greater employee commitment. Meyer, Allen, and Smith (2000) contend that the three different levels of commitment are in fact a psychological state. They either determine or define employees' bond with the

organization or have the potential to affect whether the employee will continue to remain with the organization.

From the semi-structured question, *From your experience, how would you describe your level of contentment in working for this nonprofit organization because you personally believe in its mission and values?*, approximately 90% of the employees indicated they were very content or content, and the mission was the driving contributing factor. In a study done by Brown and Yoshioka (2003) on mission attachment and awareness, a parallel was made in employees' belief in the mission and their intent to stay. By asking the semi-structured question, it was determined that the majority of the employees from this organization described an overarching belief in the organization's mission and felt satisfied working toward obtaining mission goals. One employee stated:

If measuring contentment on a scale from 1-5 with 5 being extremely content, then my answer is 5. Almost everyone globally is or has been affected by this disease and the mission of the organization is something I hope to see and experience during my lifetime.

From the semi-structured question, *From your personal experience, how do you feel that your work contributes to carrying out the mission of this nonprofit organization?* many employees felt their ability to advocate contributed to carrying out the mission. Their direct connections to policy makers and lobbyists allowed them to work and have a voice in adopting and changing policies that contributes in saving and improving lives. However, not all of the employees have direct connections with legislators to neither impact laws nor consider themselves activists, but they can understand how the work they do relate to advocating and supporting mission goals. For example, an employee stated:

Since I am a member of the media team, I am responsible for helping to deliver our message to external audiences. My team is the direct link between the work

that is being done in our office to the audience we want to hear our messages. I personally work on social media and advertising efforts. By placing ads and being vocal on social networks, I am helping to create buzz around the issue of cancer advocacy and I am connecting with lawmakers, reporters and volunteers alike.

The main theme that emerged from this question was advocacy (campaigning, promoting mission) which is part of the mission for this organization. Mason (1996) contends that employees should identify a link between their work and the fulfillment of the mission. A lack in the alignment between the two can lead to discontentment or decrease in employees' levels of commitment. According to Brown and Yoshioka (2003) "awareness of the mission, agreement with its principles, and confidence in one's ability to help carry it out are fundamental aspects of one's attachment to the organization's mission" (p. 8).

Organizational commitment is another area that continues to be studied and researched in relation to employees' performance, turnover, satisfaction, and other employee related issues. Allen and Meyer (1990) created a Three Component Model which conceptualized employee commitment on three different levels. Affective commitment refers to the need for employees to be engaged with the organization through emotional connections; continuance refers to the cost impact of leaving the organization; and normative refers to obligations the employees feel that ties them to the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). The results from the study indicated that employees described their commitment on all three levels. Meyer, Allen, and Smith (2000) suggest that "one can achieve a better understanding of an employee's relationship with an organization when all three forms of commitment are considered together" (p. 539). What is interesting with this study was that the results suggested that most of the

employees were committed more to the mission than the organization itself. Since they were more committed to the mission than to the organization, they could leave the organization and continue to carry out the mission in other capacities. Some reasons for employees not leaving the organization, despite a greater commitment to the mission, included financial reasons, the state of the economy, and/or the flexibility of having a good work-life balance.

The interview questions asked which addressed affective commitment were:

From your experience, how would you describe your level of emotional attachment to this nonprofit organization?, and From your personal experience and perception of this nonprofit organization, to what extent would you be happy spending the rest of your career here? Over half of the employees indicated or suggested they were emotionally attached to the organization and intend to remain with the organization. Although some employees described their intention to remain contingent upon needed cultural changes or job position changes in the organization, their contentment with the organization and its mission remained positive.

Affective commitment has been known to have the strongest and most positive relation toward employees' intent to stay (Meyer, Allen & Smith, 2000). Affective committed employees are committed due to their identification and emotional attachment to the organization. An employee added:

I am very new to the organization but in my short time, it has been an emotional experience when my family member was diagnosed with cancer. It reminds me everyday that I am with an organization that cares about the patients diagnosed, the families of those diagnosed, and the employees and volunteers who assist with helping you through this journey. The organization takes everyone's situation serious to find solutions.

Additionally, another employee responded by stating:

My emotional level is very strong because not only do I witness the level of commitment of co-workers but I also hear stories of survival and triumph.

Several of the themes which emerged from this question aligned with employees being emotionally attached due to the nature of the work/mission, their connection with other people, and their personal experiences with cancer. In alignment with emotional attachment, participants indicated a likelihood they would like to remain with the organization to work toward accomplishing the mission which has been set forth by the organization.

The interview questions asked which addressed continuance commitment were:

Describe any costs impact for you if you decided to leave this nonprofit organization right now and What impact does the scarcity of available job options have on your

decision whether or not to leave this organization?. Approximately 35% of the employees expressed they would suffer a financial hit or loss. Some of the loss was expressed in terms of emotional loss. One employee described the emotional loss by a stating:

I would miss the daily updates; the energy of the organization, and the camaraderie of my fellow co-worker.

Another employee described the cost impact when stated:

I have to consider that I am putting money into a retirement fund that is being matched by the organization. However, I will not receive those matched funds unless I am here for three years. I also have to consider the current job market and the expensive city that I live in.

Becker's (1960) work on continuance commitment linked the lost of employees investment concerns as a major factor in employees' decision to remain with the

organization. Meyer and Allen (1997) supported the theory by further postulating that investments through the organization can bind employees to the organization through continuance commitment. Employees expressed their commitment and intent to stay with the organization based upon personal cost impact that would occur if they would leave. The cost included lost in pension, compensation, and other factors associated with employee related investments in the organization. Meyer, Allen and Smith (2000) note that “continuance commitment develops as employees recognize they have accumulated investments that would be lost if they were to leave the organization, or as they recognize the availability of comparable alternatives is limited” (p. 539).

Financial benefits appear to play some role in retaining employees within nonprofits. One potential negative implication of employees remaining based on continuance commitment is that they may be less committed to the mission and therefore not as passionate about working toward achieving mission related goals. In addition, they are more likely to leave when a more financially attractive job opportunity becomes available. The results of the study appeared to be consistent with prior research in that those who stayed for reasons other than the mission stayed for continuance commitment, with the most common being financial reasons followed by their investment in the organization.

Interesting, several employees did not feel the scarcity of jobs had any impact on them because they intend on staying with the organization. However, if they should lose their job for some reason (e.g., budget cuts, performance issues), their concerns were tied to the overall financial cost-related factors which would come in the loss of a job which may not be equally replaced with equal financial compensation and rewards received

from their current organization. For that reason, the financial gains from their employment within the organization were still a factor, even if they intend on remaining with the organization due to the mission. The implication of this finding is that even when employees claim to be committed to the mission, their personal financial situations can affect their retention at the organization.

The two interview questions asked to recognize normative commitment were:

Describe your desire and/or thoughts on continuing to work for this nonprofit organization and supporting its mission for the next five years, and Describe your thoughts on loyalty to this organization, and do you feel a sense of moral obligation to remain? The coded responses indicated that 65% of the employees wanted to stay for at least another five years, and 55% indicated they were loyal to the organization.

However, 50% of the coded responses indicated the employees felt they were not morally obligated to stay. An employee responded:

My goal is to become another valuable asset to the organization and support the mission for the next five years until my retirement". Another employee responded, "I am very loyal to the organization and the work that it does. However, I do not feel morally obligated to stay. Whether or not I am an employee at the organization, I will support the organization my entire life as a volunteer and advocate".

Normative commitment is employees' personal obligation to remain with the organization due to their values or morals. Some employees feel this obligation due to financial or non-financial rewards given to them from the organization, or through and obligations to remain due to family generational connections to the organization.

However, many of the employees in the study expressed their loyalty to the organization, but did not feel they had a moral obligation to remain.

Loyalty was described in their desire to work toward mission goals not the obligation to work for the organization. The implication of this finding showed that the employees were more committed to the mission than to the organization itself. Therefore, if an employee believes that he or she is not directly working towards the mission of the organization for any reason, or the employee feels as if he or she can carry out the mission elsewhere under more ideal circumstances (e.g., more financial benefits, more pleasant work atmosphere, more flexible job), than the employee does not feel obligated to remain with organization. The emerging themes of being loyal to the organization and/or its mission along with plans to remain would suggest that employees described their attachment to the mission based upon other factors which would not include obligation. In other words, they can take the mission with them and advocate somewhere else.

Limitations

The limitations were directly related to the type of research conducted. The researcher used a qualitative measurement tool instead of a quantitative survey tool, previously done in other studies involving organizational commitment, to describe employee commitment. Extending the research to a qualitative, phenomenological study allowed the data to be rich with employees' personal experiences instead of numeric values from a Likert Scale.

A second limitation to the study was the restrictions on the sample. The study was limited to one nonprofit organization with the sample only including voluntary participants whose job titles fell below director's level. Having a broader sampling would allow a researcher the opportunity to further explore commitment and mission

attachment as it relates to all employees. Additionally, the study was limited to only full-time paid staff and not volunteers who also work on behalf on the organization.

Another limitation to the study involved the use of the Three Component Organizational Commitment Scale. Although all three levels, affective, continuance, and normative were used, only a few of the statements from each level on the commitment scale were adapted into interview questions to survey the target population. Using more or all of the statements from each area could have lead to more comprehensive data.

Conclusion

The literature is saturated with studies attempting to understand employee commitment to an organization and how it can affect employee behavior, work performance, and retention. Understanding mission attachment and how it relates to employees intent to remain with an organization has not been broadly explored. More research can be done to explore whether mission attachment can be used as an aggressive management tool to recruit and retain qualified employees to work toward mission goals.

The intent of this study was to describe nonprofit employees' commitment and attachment to the mission in relation to their intent to stay employed with an organization. The qualitative approach allowed employees to give responses which were based on their own personal perceptions, beliefs, and experiences. Since no known studies took the qualitative approach at describing organizational commitment, this study could be worthy for other researchers to explore on a broader scale.

The results of the study revealed that the majority of employees were aware of the mission and were mission driven with a connection and desire to be part of an organization whose purpose is to advocate for saving and improving peoples' lives.

Based on the findings, three overarching themes emerged during the study that included (1) commitment to the mission, (2) the outcomes of the work performed, which included saving lives and improving quality of life, and (3) the specific way in which the employees in the study felt advocacy was a way to save and improve lives. It is important to note that without the researcher mentioning the word “advocacy” in any of the interview questions, the employees understood this element as being a huge part of the work they do to accomplish mission goals. Additionally, their strong commitment to advocacy was often due to their personal experiences with cancer and/or their belief that they have a personal responsibility to help others.

The employees in this organization described their commitment and attachment on a more emotional level, and they plan on remaining with the organization for at least the next five years. The personal connections, whether it is with family members, friends, or co-workers who have experienced cancer, have allowed the employees to be emotionally attached to the organization’s mission and values. However, it should be noted that all employees do not carry the same sentiments as the majority.

Continued research in mission attachment and organizational commitment can allow organizations to understand what is important to their employees and take corrective measures to prevent employees from being misaligned to the mission, discontented with the organization, and not understanding how their work relates to achieving mission goals. When employees are attached to the mission and committed on some level to the organization, they usually have an emotional passion and drive which makes them want to remain with the organization to accomplish those goals.

Future Research and Recommendations

As organizations continue to view employees as their most expensive asset, future research should continue to examine organizational commitment and mission attachment using more qualitative measurement tools. The qualitative data allows the researcher a deeper and more intimate insight on how employees are committed to the organization and how it can affect their intent to stay. Additionally, more research and studies should be done on reviving mission attachment as a management tool to determine its effects on employee retention.

Allen and Meyer's (1990) Three Component Organizational Commitment Scale continues to be a notable instrument to analyze and measure employee commitment due to the different levels that can expose strong indicators to the organization about their employees' job satisfaction, work performance, and expressed intent to remain. The instrument can indicate to the organization whether employees are committed due to emotional attachments, financial and cost impacts, or an obligation to remain.

The work done by Brown and Yoshioka (2000) on mission attachment should continue to be utilized to broaden and revitalize mission attachment as a retention tool. The instrument allows an organization to determine employees' awareness of the mission and their understanding of their work as it contributes to achieving the mission. This information can be important to managers and leaders in designing job responsibilities which directly align with the mission so employees can feel more attached and want to remain in order to meet mission goals.

The researcher would recommend replication of this study and its methodology in another nonprofit organization where advocacy may not be an important component of

the mission or in a for-profit company who wants to know if their employees are aware of their mission values. For-profit companies are not immune to revenue lost realized through constant turnover of employees who are misaligned with the mission and whose commitments are unidentifiable to the company. The necessity to attract and retain qualified employees to work toward achieving mission related goals is vital to the success of any organization whether it is nonprofit or not.

Moreover, a qualitative study, such as this one, should be done on volunteers who work for nonprofit organizations. Many nonprofit organizations depend on volunteers to work unconventional hours and days which may not be feasible for a paid staff to work. Knowing how volunteers are committed and whether they are attached to the organization's mission can assist leaders and practitioners in understanding psychological factors which can be linked to retention among this group.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

From The measurement and antecedent of affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization, by Allen, N.J., & Meyer, J.P., 1990, *Journal of Occupational Psychology*. Adapted with permission.

From The measurement and antecedent of affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization, by Allen, N.J., & Meyer, J.P., 1990, *Journal of Occupational Psychology*. Reprinted with permission.

1. Why did you pursue job opportunities with this nonprofit organization?
2. What is your understanding of the mission of this nonprofit organization?
3. From your personal experience, how do you feel that your work contributes to carrying out the mission of this nonprofit organization?
4. From your experience, how would you describe your level of contentment in working for this nonprofit organization because you personally believe in its mission and values?
5. From your experience, how would you describe your level of emotional attachment to this nonprofit organization?
6. From your personal experience and perception of this nonprofit organization, to what extent would you be happy spending the rest of your career here?
7. Describe any costs impact for you if you decided to leave this nonprofit organization right now.
8. What impact does the scarcity of available job options have on your decision whether or not to leave this organization?
9. Describe your desire and/or thoughts on continuing to work for this nonprofit organization and supporting its mission for the next five years.

10. Describe your thoughts on loyalty to this organization, and do you feel a sense of moral obligation to remain?

APPENDIX B

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT SCALES

From The measurement and antecedent of affective, continuance, and normative commitment to the organization, by Allen, N.J., & Meyer, J.P., 1990, *Journal of Occupational Psychology*.

Affective Commitment Scale items:

1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.
2. I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it.
3. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
4. I think that I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one.
5. I do not feel like 'part of the family' at my organization.
6. I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organization.
7. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
8. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.

Continuance Commitment Scale items:

1. I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another one line up.
2. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now even if I wanted to.
3. Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization now.
4. It wouldn't be too costly for me to leave my organization now.
5. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire.
6. I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.
7. One of the few serious consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.
8. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice; another organization might not match the overall benefits I have here.

Normative Commitment Scale items:

1. I think that people these days move from company to company too often.
2. I do not believe that a person must always be loyal to his or her organization.
3. Jumping from organization to organization does not seem at all unethical to me.
4. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that I believe that loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain.
5. If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere, I would not feel it was right to leave my organization.

APPENDIX C

MISSION ATTACHMENT STATEMENTS

From Mission attachment and satisfaction as factors in employee retention, by Brown, W.A., & Yoshioka, 2003, *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*.

1. I am well aware of the direction and mission of (organization's name).
2. The programs and staff at my branch support the mission of (organization's name).
3. I like to work for (organization's name) because I believe in its mission and values.
4. My work contributes to carrying out the mission of (organization's name)

APPENDIX D

SELF-REFLECTIVE EPOCHÉ

Over 15 years ago, I entered into the human resource profession. I have been a technical recruiter, trainer, staffer, director, and generalist. During those years, I performed a number of interviews. When interviewing different candidates for various numbers of positions, I often wondered what attracted them to the company. Did they know the mission of the organization, or was this just another job ad they applied to seeking work?

None of the questions I asked the job applicants pertained to the mission. The interview questions were all related to the applicants' knowledge, skills, and abilities. I could not remember one hiring manager or leader ever asking whether the prospective candidates knew anything about the mission and values of the organization. As I thought back to my own interviews, I do not remember anyone even asking me whether I knew about the mission of the organization for where I was seeking work. Was it important to them? Did I even care?

When employees come into an organization, they are bombarded with paraphernalia which display the organization's mission and given employee handbooks which present the written dialogue of what they have already seen on the walls, on notepads, pens, and other objects. I have conducted many new employee orientations where I would point out the mission and values to the new group of employees knowing that some of them could possibly care less about what I am saying. Some of them were just happy to have a job which could meet their financial obligations at that time.

However, my job during the hour or two I spent with them, was to ensure they knew the organization's purpose and values which they held true.

During the process of this dissertation, I began to reflect on all of the companies I worked for and tried to recall whether I actually knew the mission of any of them. I could actually say I remembered the mission from only two organizations. The reason I remembered the mission for each one of these organizations was because I could personally relate to its purpose. According to Campbell (1992) most employees desire work that is purposeful and enjoyable and relates to values similar to their own. The work that was done in both organizations provided for a greater cause, and I wanted to be part of helping to achieve those goals.

In one organization, my emotional attachment was in connection to the way in which leaders showed they cared for their employees through training opportunities and positive employee relations which kept employees aligned with the shared vision. I worked for that organization for several years and continued to advance in career opportunities until a personal decision to pursue an advanced business degree no longer aligned with the career track for further advancement. However, I have to admit that during this transition, my commitment mirrored more of being committed on a continuance level because I could not readily leave due to financial obligations.

In the second organization, I joined due to a personal and emotional attachment to the organization's mission and values. It was these values that I held dear to my heart and felt that I wanted to remain with this organization to see these mission goals accomplished. I worked hard and involved myself in all aspects of the company where I felt I could make a difference. According to Allen and Meyer (1990) Three Component

Model of Organizational Commitment, I was initially committed on an affective level due to my emotional connection and engagement with the organization. However, due to other employee relation issues and conflicts, I did not remain with the organization, although I continue to believe in the organization's mission and values and involve myself in activities that relates directly to the organization's missions on a more voluntary basis.

In performing this study, I am full of excitement and curiosity to see what the findings will uncover. I have an open mind and ready to hear what is important to my participants and how they feel about the mission and their commitment to the organization. I put my personal reasons for leaving the organizations where I previously worked aside as I eagerly await to hear the personal stories of others as to whether they understand the mission and if they are attached and committed. Furthermore, I want to hear if they feel their attachment or commitment to the organization will retain them.

Additionally, through the process of this dissertation, I acquired so much information about employees and their psychological contracts. I learned how employees can be committed to an organization and whether they are aware and attached to the mission. In processing this information, I wondered if I had not fulfilled my job as a human resource professional over the years. Had I ignored literature which could have allowed me a better understanding of organizational commitment and mission attachment which may have been valuable in determining tenure among employees?

I appreciate and embrace the differences in values that each person brings with them to the workplace. My only hope is that the results of this study will add just a little more to the body of knowledge in these subject areas.