

Below the Salary Line: Employee Engagement of Non-Salaried Employees

Brad Shuck and Carlos Albornoz
Florida International University

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*Brad Shuck and Carlos Albornoz
Florida International University*

This exploratory empirical phenomenological study looks at employee engagement using Kahn (1990) and Maslow's (1970) motivational theories to understand the experience of non-salaried employees. This study finds four themes that seem to affect employee engagement: work environment, employee's supervisor, individual characteristics of the employee, and opportunities for learning. Discussion of impact and contribution to the HRD field are discussed.

Keywords: Engagement, Satisfaction, Productivity

In the United States, 146 million people go to work every day (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). Employees desire positive feelings about their work experience (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002) going beyond traditional definitions of job satisfaction, "an individual's attitude towards their work" (Brayfield & Rothe, 1951), and instead takes the more global perspective of employee engagement. Employee engagement is defined as an employee's "involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work" (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002, p. 269). Employee engagement is derived from "work that stretches a person without defeating him; work that provides clear goals, unambiguous feedback, and a sense of control" (Emmott, 2006, p. 35). Engagement occurs when employees know what to expect, have the resources to complete their work, participate in opportunities for growth and feedback, and feel that they contribute significantly to the organization (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). When employees are engaged, they are emotionally connected to others and cognitively vigilant to the direction of the team (2002). Being engaged in their work, employees find meaning and excitement in the jobs they perform.

For many organizations, the difference between disengaged and engaged employees is the difference between success and failure (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002). An estimated 71% of the global workforce goes to work disengaged (Crabtree, 2004). This engagement gap is costly for employers. Showing up for work consistently is one of the first ways an employee can exemplify engagement. "Engaged employees average 27% less absenteeism than [employees] who are...disengaged" (Wagner & Harter, 2006, p. xiii). Engaged employees affect the customer experience as well. Employees who are more engaged in their work score 12% higher on customer satisfaction-rating scales (2006). In the case of productivity, "business units in the top quartile on employee engagement averaged \$80,000 to \$120,000 higher revenues or sales...per month" (p. 14). Retention efforts cost organizations millions per year in employee replacement, recruiting, and staffing. Employee turnover costs a company \$30,000 per employee; retaining just ten employees saves \$300,000 a year (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002). "Workgroups with an inordinately high number of disengaged workers lose 51% more of their inventory to 'shrink' than those on the other end of the spectrum" (Harter & Wagner, 2006, p. xiv-xv). Disengaged employees cut the United States "economic performance by...\$300 billion" a year (The Gallup Organization, 2001).

Research Questions and Purpose Statement

Engaged employees are happier employees, produce increased profit, exhibit high levels of creativity, experience less absenteeism, have fewer on-the-job accidents, and positively affect business unit level outcomes (Harter & Wagner, 2006). Despite the benefits of having highly engaged employees, "there is a surprising dearth of research on employee engagement" (Saks, 2006, p. 600).

Current trends in hiring more independent, non-salaried employees (Beck, 2003) as well as the depleting talent shortage across the globe (Frank, Finnegan, & Taylor, 2004) have demanded a new look at the employability and sustainability of this growing workforce population. A non-salaried employee is defined as independent, contract labor paid by the hour (Beck, 2003). As non-salaried employees shape the emerging workforce landscape, companies and Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals across the globe should know how to cultivate positive employer-employee relationships as well as how to retain this important cross section of the workforce (Beck, 2003). Little research has investigated the experience of being engaged from the employee perspective and little is known about how non-salaried employees experience engagement or how engagement affects their experience and performance at work.

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The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore how non-salaried employees describe the experience of being engaged at work. Three in depth interviews are used to explore emergent themes about how participants experience engagement. The phenomenon of interest is engagement at work of non-salaried employees. Through this research, we do not pretend to reach generalizable conclusions about employee engagement; rather, we hope to open reflection and dialogue, grounded in preliminary data, that gives voice to non-salaried employees who are often not looked at in the traditional employee engagement literature. The research questions are: (a) how do non-salaried employees describe the experience of being engaged at work and (b) what factors contribute to the feeling of engagement? We limit this study to the specific purpose of exploring the experience of three non-salaried workers and their experience with the phenomenon of interest. First, a conceptual framework of employee engagement is presented. Second, the method of data collection and analysis is explained. Lastly, the findings of factors that contribute to the creation of employee engagement are described.

Conceptual Framework

Kahn's (1990) seminal grounded theory of employee engagement and disengagement posited that engagement is the concurrent expression of one's preferred self and the promotion of connections to others. Disengagement is the withdrawal of oneself and of one's preferred behaviors, promoting a lack of connectedness, emotional absence, and passive behavior. The choice to express or withdraw one's authentic self is the emotional, social, and physical act of employee engagement. Humans become drawn into their work, physically and emotionally, in ways that display how they experience work. "Self expression underlies what researchers refer to as creativity, the use of personal voice, emotional expression, authenticity, non-defensive communication, playfulness, and ethical behavior" (Kahn, 1990, p. 700). Workers chose to "express and employ their [authentic] selves...or withdraw and defend their [authentic] selves" at work (Kahn, 1990, p. 692).

Constructs important to understanding engagement and disengagement at work are meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Meaningfulness is defined as the positive "sense of return on investments of self in role performance" (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). Safety is defined as the ability to show one's self "without fear or negative consequences to self image, status, or career (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). Availability is defined as the "sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary" for the completion of work (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). Employee engagement or employee disengagement develops to the degree that these psychological constructs can be fulfilled (Kahn, 1990). Herzberg's two-factor theory parallels Kahn's engagement theory by proposing autonomy in being, recognition of self and work, and meaningful understanding as factors that increase an employee's intrinsic willingness to engage in work (Latham & Ernst, 2006). Intrinsic factors (i.e. importance of contribution, personal growth), rather than extrinsic factors (i.e. compensation, company image) actually motivate employees to be engaged in their work. The identification and satisfaction of individual needs was recognized as important components to engaging employees in Kahn (1990) and Herzberg's (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) theories; however, an understanding of individual needs are never fully explored or linked in conceptualization. Maslow's (1970) theory of motivation provides a straightforward conceptual framework for understanding basic human needs and gives context to the conceptualization of employee engagement and disengagement. Additionally, Porter's work in understanding "low level jobs" (Latham & Ernst, 2006, p. 182) confirms the necessity for understanding human needs as it relates to engagement at work as conceptualized in Maslow's (1970) motivation theory.

The importance of Maslow's motivation theory in relation to employee engagement can be found in the structure of the theory as well as the conceptualization of each of the basic needs as it relates to engagement. Structurally, needs are first arranged in order of potency (Reeve, 2001). Second, the more foundational and critical to survival the need, the sooner it appears in the hierarchy (2001). Third, needs are filled sequentially from lowest to highest, thus establishing a hierarchy of needs grouped into two categories, survival and growth. These needs, individually listed as physiological, safety, belonging and love, esteem, and self-actualization needs are the basic needs of human beings (1970). Physiological needs are defined as the most potent of needs for human survival (Maslow, 1970) and are found at the bottom of the hierarchy. The safety need is defined as feeling protected, being free from fear, and/or having a feeling of control over one's life (1970). The belonging and love need is defined as the development of relationships and affection (1970). The esteem need is defined as the "desire for a stable, firmly based, usually high evaluation of [the self], for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others" (Maslow, 1970, p. 45). Self-actualization is defined as the completion of activity that intensely satisfies (Maslow, 1970). The drive to self-actualization parallels the concept of employee engagement as used in Kahn's (1990) work by conceptualizing the drive to ultimate self fulfillment, a deep need for internal, emotional satisfaction that all humans long for; employees long "to become everything one is capable of becoming" (Maslow, 1998, p. 3). For these individuals, work becomes of part of their identity.

Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of employee engagement refers to the atmosphere created in the workplace as forces external to the employee, while Maslow's (1970) motivation theory is internal. Through the satisfaction of needs (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Maslow, 1998), an employee makes the decision to express their authentic self, an internal decision based on external forces (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002; Kahn, 1990).

Method

Phenomenology seeks to understand the experience of individuals (Creswell, 2003), beginning with silence (Psathas, 1973) and ending with interpretation (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007). In this case, the meaning that participants give to events that predate or coexist with the sense of being engaged as well as with the activities they perform at work is the phenomenology under study. All employees interviewed for this study worked for a multinational service corporation ranked by Forbes magazine as one "America's Most Admired Companies." The Director of Operations for the company agreed to be the key informant for the study. A key informant is someone with whom researchers have an especially good rapport and is particularly helpful, insightful, and articulate in providing data (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007). One of the researchers and the key informant are both service providers at the same institution and had developed a previously existing professional relationship before any research had begun. This existing relationship made it possible to interview participants using corporate facilities and work time to perform research. The first participant was a male working in his current position for three months; we identify this participant as John throughout the duration of this research. The second participant was a female working in her current position for ten years; we identify this participant as Ashley. The third participant was a female working in her current position for three years; we identify this participant as Sarah. This study was implemented in Miami-Dade County, Florida, where 60.6% of the population is Hispanic (US Census Bureau, 2004). Coincidentally, the three participants willing to give interviews were Hispanic. While this homogenous factor can be considered a limitation of the study, we make no claim that our conclusions are generalizable to the larger Hispanic population in Miami-Dade County, the global workforce, or that we reached saturation. The study is designed as exploratory; however, "the more similar participants in a sample are in their experiences with respect to the research domain, the sooner we would expect to reach saturation" (Bunce et al, 2006 p.76). Therefore, the sample is interesting and novel enough to achieve the purpose of this exploratory study using in-depth interviews as a data collection method. The focus of this study is on how our participant's experiences contribute to the larger understanding of how employees experience the phenomenon of engagement at work.

Data was collected through face-to-face, in-depth interviews lasting an average of 1 hour and 17 minutes. A 30 question conversational guide was used to help the interviewer focus on the agreed research topic. A conversational guide is a structured set of questions that gives direction to the starting points of conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The guide included questions about expectations at work, general feelings about work, resources at work, the use of skills and/ or talents at work, supervision, co-workers, and general questions about an employee's satisfaction level. Interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy independently by each researcher.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were read and coded by each researcher twice. During the first round of readings, one researcher identified 26 patterns and the second researcher identified 21. During analysis, a journal was used to record observations and reflections about emergent patterns and experiences of the researchers. A second round of readings was completed with the researchers together using a spreadsheet to compile patterns capturing the participants' experience of engagement at work. After the second reading, the initial patterns identified in the first round were collapsed into four emergent themes.

Emergent themes were presented to three different groups for peer review. The first group was comprised of graduate students studying qualitative research at a large urban university. The second group was a class comprised of graduate students studying writing for publication. The third group included HRD practitioners, professors, and graduate students studying education at a writing club. Feedback was received at all three venues and has been incorporated into this paper.

Influencing Themes of Employee Engagement

Four emergent themes were identified through the analysis of data: work environment, supervisor, characteristics of the employee, and opportunity for learning.

Work Environment

A work environment is defined as the physical and emotional characteristics of the workspace, including relationships with colleagues and typical job functions. How people feel about the environmental climate where they

work affects their level of engagement (Brown & Leigh, 1996). Cooperation, support, trust, and partnerships were ways participants described their ideas about an engaging environment. Early in our interview, John recalled a disengaging experience in a previous job, describing that work experience as a cutthroat, aggressive environment. When asked about how this type of environment affected his motivation, John shared the following about his experience. “It’s awful, because I took work home with me. I take it all up here, so I mean, if it’s bad at work, you take it home with you.” When probed deeper, John disclosed further and compared his previous work environment to his current work environment. “I worked in some places where you get along with the person, but it is still work, you know. It’s I like you, but don’t mess up, cause... you know, you’ll get fired. It’s not like that here”.

The varying experience of safety from one environment to another affected John’s experience of work. A fear of being fired was the sole motivating factor in the first job described. John could not move beyond the fear that he could lose his job with the next mistake. As John describes his current position, you could hear the relief in his voice. Safety needs, such as feeling protected, being free from fear, having a feeling of order, and knowing one’s limits are potent needs for human beings (Maslow, 1970) and are essential to the foundation of motivational theory as operationalized in Brown and Leigh (1996). Employees cannot disregard the need to feel safe at work; without fulfilling this need, they can become paralyzed mentally. An employee may show up for work physically, but mentally and emotionally they are not present. Feeling safe also contributes to the developing feeling that one is a part of something bigger, such as a family unit.

The concept of “family” emerged as an influencing pattern in the work environment theme. Participants saw their co-workers as an extension of their immediate family units and genuinely cared for their co-workers. Ashley recounted stories about crying when she had been asked to hold staff members accountable. The pain she shared was physically evident on her face as she recounted these experiences. The sense of family was critical and wholly important in her life and became an emotional and affective component of her motivation at work. We asked deeper about how feeling like a family at work affected her experience at work and she shared the following.

When I get here everyday, no matter what I am doing, I always compare my place with my home. No matter what kind of problem. When I am there [at home] and I am doing it, I forget about everything. When I am here, I forget about my mom, my place, my kids, my problems, even myself... It is like I am spending my eight hours dreaming about things, how I can make this better, how you can make nice things. Believe me, I never thought about [the] money...when I am here, this is most important therapy that I have in my life, because no matter what kind of problems I am having, when I park my car [to come to work], my problems go away.

Work was a coping mechanism for Ashley. Employees cope together with struggles and challenges, and even celebrate successes together. Employees who feel lonely and not a part of the organization are often disengaged.

Supervisor

A supervisor is defined as any person who is charged with the direct management of an employee. Frontline supervisors do much of the engagement work. “The root of employee disengagement is [often] poor management” (Gopal 2003). Employees see their companies from the same perspective they see their supervisors (Galford & Drapeau 2003). In our interviews, each participant’s supervisor came up as a motivating force for being engaged or disengaged at work. John shared about how he sees his current supervisor and how this view is either a motivating or de-motivating force for him. Being new to the industry, John needed a developmental leader who could help him learn about the business. “[Supervisors are] the ones that evaluate me, they’re the ones that, you know, demand that I do a good job...I feel like they both have been unbelievable, so far. They have been good. Probably the best bosses that I’ve had”. John chose the words to describe the experience with his supervisor carefully. The mention of “evaluation”, “demand”, and an “unbelievable” supervisor may not traditionally be paired together. For John, this current supervisory style allows for a feeling of safety, high expectations, and an ability to grow. The feeling of having a great supervisor, maybe the “best bosses” he has ever had, have an impact on his experience of work. When asked how this supervisor behaviorally portrayed their style, he shared that he had seen his supervisors “roll up their sleeves” to lend a hand when lines got long or teams were short staffed for the day. “[As an employee] we don’t mind getting our hands dirty, ... I guess they see that, cause I know, I’ve seen it, like I saw today [one of our supervisor’s] was working at [a restaurant] because they’re short staffed. That’s awesome”. The experience of seeing his supervisor work behind the counter with staff gave confidence to John and reinforced a positive supervisory relationship, even though they were not directly involved with the scenario. John went on to share that throughout his experiences, he had never worked with a supervisor so willing to lead by example.

With a smiling face and positive reflection in her tone, Ashley shared her feeling of value at work. In past experiences, Ashley was just another number, just another line chef, or just another dishwasher for the crew. She

was rarely asked her opinions or asked to think about what she was doing. She was to work and get her job done only to go home, come back, and clock in the next day. While in a much different situation now, Ashley shared the following about her current experience at work. “They [my supervisors] make me feel like I am somebody. Like I am not another number, like I am another employee, they make me feel like I am a very important person to them”. This feeling of importance parallels the belonging need in Maslow’s (1970) theory and creates a feeling of positive emotion for the employee. Emotions broaden an employee’s ability to think and momentarily build their available emotional and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 1998). Positive emotions have evolutionary roots and are linked to basic human needs (Fredrickson, 1998). The emotions of joy, love, contentment, and interest cut across workplace culture and boundaries, representing high emotional activity (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002). Serving as motivation to pursue desires, emotion creates purpose, shaping the context of learning experiences (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Reeve, 2001) and plays a critical role in constructing meaning and knowledge (Dirkx, 2001).

Negative emotions have an opposite effect. When employees are feeling positive at work, they may not notice unless the thought is brought to consciousness. An employee experiencing a negative situation is keen to feeling negative at work and the sense of awareness is heightened. John shared the following about a negative supervisory experience. It was not that his supervisor had held him accountable for a wrong action, but rather a feeling of negativity was an undercurrent of the work environment that was perpetuated by the supervisor. “It’s awful...[you go] to work the next day having somebody have to be on top of you...they don’t care about you...they don’t want you to mess up...and if you mess up, you are fired. Feeling negative permeates the employee’s life both inside and outside of work as described by John.

“Top performing managers have an approach to management that focuses on developing the strengths of the individuals they manage” (Clifton & Harter, 2003, p. 7), rather than a focus on weakness. The emphasis on an employee’s strengths is empowering and aids in the development of trust. Employees who trust their manager “will take smarter risks, work harder, have higher retention rates, contribute better ideas, and dig deep within the institutions culture” (Galford & Drapeau, 2003, p. 90).

Characteristics of the Employee

Unique characteristics, beliefs, and work philosophies are ubiquitous among humans. A characteristic of the employee is defined as a perception that the employee has about himself or herself and that this actively applied to life roles. Two unique characteristics emerged as patterns throughout or data collection. They were (a) the need for challenge and (b) an entrepreneurial spirit.

The need for challenge. All three participants talked about being challenged and the motivational effect challenge had on their work. Before sharing this quote with the one of the researchers, Ashley shared stories about her previous experience working in several restaurants and large hotels before her current position. She spoke of looking for challenge in her work and seeking opportunities to grow. Ashley went on to share that if she challenged herself, she would learn more on the job, and potentially be promoted. When asked about why she felt a need for challenge Ashley expressed feeling an innate characteristic that was hard to capture in words. “There is something inside of me, I want to keep going, I want to learn more, I want to jump higher. I want to be challenged.” After sharing this information, she went on to talk about moving from company to company often in search of a challenging environment, hoping to stretch her knowledge and continue learning more. Sarah alluded to her motivation at work and the need for challenge. Sarah recalled that she looks for challenge to keep occupied and in continuous development. “I am a very quick learner, so I get bored really fast if I don’t have challenges, if something is not challenging, it’s boring.” Probing deeper with Sarah, we asked about a challenge she had recently faced. Sarah shared a story about learning to work on a cash register for the first time in a very commanding and confident tone. She felt like she could try anything and liked the idea of being challenged daily at work. “I had never worked on a register on my life. I just figured it out. Let me do it. That doesn’t bother me at all”.

The need for challenge parallels growth toward Maslow’s (1970) fourth need, the esteem need. When employees feel that they are growing and learning, self-confidence and self-achievement develop, resulting in a strong confidence at work. Promotion of the authentic self occurs as the safety of understanding ones workplace develops. The need for challenge develops out of the fulfillment of preceding needs and encompasses the meaningfulness, safety, availability, constructs in Kahn’s (1990) conceptualization of employee engagement.

Entrepreneurial spirit. One out of every 150 adults has participated in the founding of a new firm every year and one out of 12 adults has been involved in trying to launch a new firm (Kuratko, 2005). New entrepreneurial ventures have been predicted to increase fifteen percent each year (Bauerschmidt, Chrisman, & Hofer, 1998). Asking our participants about why they continued to work in their current industry and why not in another, John and Sarah directly shared that they wanted to own their own businesses in the future. They were each taking this time to learn as much as they could about the business to better prepare them for opening their own venture in the future. Both participants spoke excitedly about the future and the opportunities the future seemed to hold for them. Sarah

shared the following about her dream of owning a business in the future: “honestly I hope to open my own restaurant. I would love to manage a restaurant, like it would just be mine, just mine...and I think that would be great...(long pause), I would really like having my own restaurant.” John shared his hopes of owning a business in a shy, almost hidden voice. While John could see his dream, he had not embraced the idea fully and was still exploring the potential reality, but it was there. “I kind of secretly always wanted to open up a restaurant and try to open up a bar.” John seemed unsure of his future, but had a dream and was consciously self-aware of it, turning it into motivation to learn and challenge at work. This self-awareness and the ability to be self-aware in the workplace, while not tangible, were important to the experience of engagement at work for these participants.

Opportunity to Learn

Opportunities to learn something new at work were important to all three participants. Learning is defined as “a change in behavior, cognition, or affect that occurs as a result of one’s interaction with the environment” (Werner & Desimone, 2006, p. 33). A learning environment results from opportunities to learn at work and is defined as an environment that allows employees to gain new skills and knowledge “without fear or negative consequences to self image, status, or career” (Kahn, 1990, p. 705). Learning is foundational to the employee experience and occurs instinctively, although at times unconsciously throughout the course of employment. Employees seek information about the experiences they encounter to make meaning of what they have experienced. “Learning is not only primal; it is constant and significant; survival is at the primal core of learning” (Shuck, Albornoz, & Winberg, 2007, p.1). Humans look for ways of understanding experiences as they are occurring, hoping to learn something applicable to interactions and challenges in life. Experience is not isolated, but connected to previous opportunities for learning often associated with emotions. Emotions, the cognitive manifestations of behavioral acts, are at an employee’s deepest core (Shuck, et al., 2007), paralleling Maslow’s fourth need, giving employees a sense they are valued. Through the fulfillment of this need an employee becomes comfortable with the promotion of the real self rather than the pseudo-self (1970) only after the safety need has been met (Kahn, 1990).

Participants expressed learning more as an incidental experience rather than an act they set out to accomplish every day. Incidental learning is defined as ever-present unconscious learning (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Ashley walked us through her promotions at an earlier company. She shared her experiences of working in the dish room, next being moved to prep chef, and lastly, finding herself in the kitchen as an assistant, but was never formally trained or asked to attend professional development to gain the skills to continue advancing. “Every time they kept moving me, they was like, giving me some more money, more benefits, but by that time I did not even care about the money, because I was happy because they were moving me and I was learning.” For Sarah, learning emerged as an important pattern in her motivation for coming to work and performing her best. Although unable to define the learning that was occurring, when asked how she ranked the feeling of learning with other tangible artifacts such as pay, Sarah shared that learning for her was the most important variable right now. She saw her career aspiration of opening a business as primary motivation that enhanced the motivation for work. “For me right now, experience is more important than money, because this is my career. I want all the experience I can get.”

Sarah’s feeling of safety (i.e. ability to pay personal expenses, access to basic resources such as food, water, and clothes) must be present and psychological and emotional resources (i.e. support from supervisor, feeling of belonging with co-workers) must be available to make such bold statements about learning. Without such resources, employees reverse this paradigm and place pay as the overall most important variable (Maslow, 1970). A supervisor who works with an employee to learn, reinforces the experience of learning for the employee, strengthens the perception of safety and available psychological and emotional resources (Fredrickson, 1998).

When asked who taught him about formal and informal expectations on the job, John expressed that no one had explicitly shared expectations with him. Having no previous experience in the industry, the supervisor became the primary source of knowledge for John’s learning. When probed deeper, John shared that he could ask questions without negative consequences. Asking questions was the way in which John learned many of his role expectations, job functions, and deadlines. He expressed a feeling of comfort with asking questions and seeking clarity in a supportive environment. “I’m not afraid to ask them a question, I’m not. I mean, I ask it, they answer it. They talk fast and want you to get it, but ... they have been nothing but helpful. And nothing but a great source of knowledge.” For John, the supervisor became a teaching figure, developing the kind of relationship that a student might develop with their professor.

Discussion of Impact

As employers of non-salaried employees, supervisors should be more aware of the environment they created in relation to a feeling of safety and meaningfulness (Kahn, 1990; Maslow, 1970) at work as well as the formal and informal learning opportunities presented to employees, no matter their level. The feeling of learning something new

everyday at work, no matter conscious or unconscious kept our participants motivated. The learning theme was not a surprise; however, the role incidental learning plays in the experience of learning was. Each of us would have expected that meaningful learning would be overt through professional development opportunities; however, our participants showed us that learning can take place all the time through any activity in which the employee is engaged. Additionally, the importance of the supervisory role was reinforced, such as the literature suggests (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Harter & Wagner, 2006); this research bolsters those findings.

As an outcome of engagement, all our participants talked about the significant role a supportive workplace environment played in their lives. John and Ashley called those they worked with a second family, while Sarah alluded to the significance her co-workers played in her daily life. There was a clear distinction that to each of them, feeling comfortable with those they worked beside and feeling that those they worked with cared about whom they were as human beings was a motivating factor. The literature supports the feeling of family at work (Rath, 2006), however it is our experience that in this workplace it was hard to find and even harder to foster. As an output of engagement, a family-type workplace emerges and the emotionality of employees takes on a whole new dimension. Supervisors at all levels should pay attention to the environments they create and directly influence. As the literature suggests, this population of non-salaried staff are becoming more critical to the functionality and operation of business (Beck, 2003). Attending to the findings of this exploratory study could help employers take advantage of the benefits of employee engagement.

Contribution to the HRD

Clear expectations, unambiguous feedback, and worker resources have all been considered key conditions to creating an engaged work environments (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Harter & Wagner, 2006); our participants did not refer to these constructs during the interview. This exploratory phenomenology then, offers a new perspective to articulate interventions that lend themselves to the creation of engaging work environments, reducing turnover and increasing employee motivation. Our findings suggest that to enhance engagement someone must empower opportunities for learning in employees, establish a rapport between supervisor and employee (i.e. build trust), and encourage the understanding of unique employee characteristics. Staffing practices, recruitment process, career development plans, and on the job trainings should be designed to secure learning environments, challenge thought, and encourage the development of individual employees, and lastly, provide opportunities for relationships to develop.

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