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A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO FACTORS THAT AFFECT PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC
ADVISORS' WORK ENGAGEMENT

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by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that impacted the employee engagement of professional academic advisors in a college or university setting. Using the framework of Waldman and Spangler's Determinates of Individual Job Performance and the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model to guide the research, findings from this study enhance the fields of workforce development and academic advising by enhancing understanding of employee engagement and the factors that influence it, specifically in the field of academic advising. This study brought together existing literature and research related to three areas that laid the foundation for this study: employee engagement, academic advising, and performance. The narrative inquiry method was used to examine the factors that influence the work engagement of academic advisors. The research questions were: (1) What defines the professional academic advisors' work engagement experience; (2) What factors contribute to the manifestation of highly engaged academic advisors; (3) What self-reported issues negatively impact the work engagement of academic advisors; and (4) What, if any, coping strategies do academic advisors employ to address those issues? A semi-structured interview instrument was developed and trialed using the assistance of 2 individuals serving as participants. Data collection consisted of 15 interviews with 5 professional academic advisors from across the country. Collected data were coded using a line-by-line coding technique. Analysis of data resulted in the development of six themes: Theme 1: Positive Experiences with Advisors; Theme 2: Desire to Help Others; Theme 3: Strategies for Handling Stressful Times; Theme 4: Additional Duties and Responsibilities; Theme 5: Leadership Support and Understanding; Theme 6: Training and Development Opportunities. Findings from this will help leaders of all organizations but especially those in educational institutions that employ professional academic advisors. The

information collected could be used by universities administrators, managers, front-line supervisors, and all those with a vested interest in employee engagement and organization success.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Historical Perspective

In recent years, the phrase employee engagement has been of significant importance for scholars and practitioners within many fields, especially those within business, human resource management, human resource development, organization development, and even psychology (Kim, Kolb, & Kim, 2012). There are several reasons why this phrase is increasingly coming into focus among leaders within these professions. Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) explained that, “Currently, organizations expect their employees to be proactive and show initiative, collaborate smoothly with others, take responsibility for their own professional development, and to be committed to high quality performance standards” (p. 147). In turn, companies most desire employees who have energy and dedication, and who are thoroughly engaged in their assigned work (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Moreover, those employees who are more engaged than others appear increasingly attractive to their organization because they tend to be more productive, have lower turnover rates, and experience less absenteeism, among other qualities proven to be highly sought-after by employers (Demerouti, Bakker, Sonnentag, & Fullagar, 2012; Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Even though there has been significant interest in employee engagement and recognition of its importance in organizations, no single definition has emerged due to the lack of consensus among scholars and practitioners as to what exactly it is (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). However, what is certain is that finding a reasonable balance between work and personal life is critical because it is what keeps an employee from crossing the line to burnout and this can be a detrimental state for the employee and the organization (Baumgardner & Myers, 2014).

Employees must be able to locate a balance so that they do not cross the line from being engaged to being burned out. Schaufeli et al. (2001) provided the following description of what an engaged employee experiences: “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state- of-mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 74). Striking a balance is essential for the health of the employee and their organization.

The focus of this study was the profession of academic advising and its links to work engagement. Rodriguez-Munoz, Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti and Bakker (2013) said, “The concept of work engagement has traditionally been linked to various indicators of occupational well-being such as job satisfaction, involvement, and reduced burnout” (p. 2). The one other link is objective performance (Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2013). According to Rothbard and Patil (2011), “One key reason why engagement has captured the interests of scholars and managers is that across a wide array of studies using different operationalizations of engagement, many studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between engagement and performance” (p. 61). Engaged employees have an enhanced emotional connection to their work, their organization, and their colleagues, which causes them to produce better results for the organization (Zaballo & Myers, 2014). Improved employee performance is without question one of the most significant benefits for organizations when a culture of engagement is being fostered by leadership and staff.

The history of academic advising as a profession dates back to the earliest days of educational institutions. According to Shaffer, Zalewski, and Leveille (2010) “the establishment of academic advising as a full-time occupation was clearly recognizable at the beginning of the great expansion of higher education following World War II” (p. 70). Academic advising is a critical component of every academic institution and dates back to even the earliest of times. Gillispie (2003) also reminded us that, “the concept of advising students has been present in

some shape or form since the inception of higher education in America” (p. 1). It was during the late eighteenth century that America created its first institutions of higher education, fondly referred to as colleges. Some of these colleges were: Harvard, Yale, William and Mary New Jersey, King's, Philadelphia, Rhode Island Queen's and Dartmouth (Randolph, 1990). The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA; 2012) summarized academic advising in the following way:

Academic advising, based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students' educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes (p. 1).

Over time, the practice of advising became more sophisticated, as developmental psychology and higher education pedagogy replaced an earlier, more rudimentary understanding of advising practice as the prescription of course choices” (Schulenberg & Lindhorst, 2008, 47). Academic advisors have the capacity to play a critical role in the lives of their students, especially during those critical years as a student. The extent of this relationship depends on both the advisor and the student. It is an investment of time and a dedication of oneself. Professional academic advisor's work engagement can be influenced by a number of factors. As with any occupation, they too can face work-related stresses, challenges with leadership/ colleagues, and even fatigue. Since work engagement directly impacts one's job performance, an understanding of the relationship between the two is imperative.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the factors that influence the work engagement of professional academic advisors and those that may cause potential burnout among these professionals. Bakker (2009) explained that one of the main drivers of work engagement is job resources. He went on to describe these job resources, “such as social support from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, skill variety, autonomy, and learning opportunities...hence, resources are not only necessary to deal with (high) job demands, but they also are important in their own right” (Bakker, 2009, p. 9).

Advisors are considered professional advisors when they hold the official duty title of academic advisor and work within the constraints of a regionally accredited university. According to Kerlinger (1986), “It is not always possible for the researcher to formulate his problem simply, clearly, and completely. He often may only have a rather general, diffuse, even confused, notion of the problem...a problem, then is an interrogative sentence or statement that asks: What relation exists between two or more variables?” (pp. 16–17). The relationship between the engagement of academic advisors and their ability to carry out their job to its fullest has a direct impact on the students for whom they have responsibility. Shaffer et al. (2010) talked about the importance of “research both to support the body of knowledge upon which academic advising practice is based and to document the impact of academic advising on institutional retention and graduation as well as student success” (p. 74).

Additionally, the extent to which one’s work engagement has been affected, either negatively or positively, can continue to significantly impact the work environment. Shaffer et al. (2010) also reiterated that leaders within the field of advising should “publicize the contributions of quality academic advising to the university and college community and to their stakeholders,

encouraging advisors to regulate themselves by assessing the impact of advising and evaluating individual advisors' performance, and providing developmental training for advisors" (p. 74).

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study have implications for research and practice within the field of academic advising. This investigation is significant in the field of research because it contributes greatly to a body of knowledge and a deeper understanding of an area with a limited existing literature about professional academic advisors. Much of the available literature is about student satisfaction or faculty perception, rather than what the academic advisor experiences him- or herself. However, according to the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), "Academic advising is a crucial component of all students' experiences in higher education. Through advising, students can find meaning in their lives, make significant decisions about their futures, and access all that higher education has to offer" (p. 2). Advisors not only have a meaningful role to play but they can significantly influence the lives of their students, either positively or negatively, just by being present.

Relatively little is known about either the positive or negative factors that influence the work engagement of academic advisors but much is known about work engagement itself. This study was one more step toward reducing this knowledge gap. For the field of academic advising, a subject matter dominated by research focusing on student engagement, using narrative qualitative inquiry to gain the professionals' perspective from professionals seemed the optimal approach. "When practiced with competence and dedication, academic advising is integral to student success, persistence, and retention. In an age often characterized by impersonal detachment, academic advising provides a vital personal connection students need in order to persist and succeed" (CAS, 2011, p. 3). Following this approach enabled academic

advisors to share their personal experiences and offered a clearer understanding of how they believe their job performance is impacted by their level of work engagement.

Research Questions

The overall goal of this study was to explore the work engagement experience of professional academic advisors. The research questions that steered this narrative inquiry study were informed by the long-standing Jobs Demands-Resource model by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) and the Determinates of Individual Job Performance model by Waldmon and Spangler (1989, 2004).

1. What defines the professional academic advisers' work engagement experience?
2. What factors contribute to the manifestation of highly engaged academic advisers?
3. What self-reported issues negatively impact the work engagement of academic advisers?
4. What, if any, coping strategies do academic advisers employ to address those issues?

Limitations of the Study

This study's limitations included the following: Participants were advisors who had been awarded the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Outstanding Advising Award for their Primary Role as an Academic Advisor. Although this choice was planned, these highly qualified advisors had experience ranging from 5 to over 20 years. All had master's degrees. The information collected on their experiences reflected this background.

Another limitation was this study's focus on the experiences and views of academic advisors in higher education; no other populations were interviewed for this study. The sample size was small, but this size did allow for in-depth interviewing of participants. The data collected from this very specific group of advisors enabled this study to make a significant

contribution to the literature on academic advisors' level of work engagement and how work engagement can have an impact on their overall job performance.

Definitions of Terms

Burnout: “Burnout is a stress syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion and cynicism generally caused by high job demands and a shortage in job resources” (Ten Brummelhuis, Ter Hoeven, Bakker, & Peper, 2011, p. 268).

Drivers: “...one that provides impulse or motivation <a *driver* in this economy” (Merriam-Webster Online, 2014, p. 1).

Employee Cynicism: “Employee cynicism has been described as characterized by negative attitudes of frustration, disillusionment, and contempt toward and distrust of business organizations, executives, managers and other objects in the workplace” (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006, p. 201).

Job Performance: “... the process of performance, the outcome of performance, or both” (Bakker & Leiter, 2010, p. 148).

Professional Academic Advisor: “The advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and program progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus services as necessary (NACADA, 2013, p. 1). For the purposes of this study, advisors who held the official job title of “Academic Advisor” were interviewed. They had earned at minimum of a bachelor’s degree and had at least of one year of experience as an academic advisor.

Work Engagement: “Work engagement is a multidimensional construct defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006, p. 168).

Assumptions of This Study

All research studies include some assumptions and this one was no exception. The assumptions of this study were as follows:

1. Advisors experience negative factors that impact their level of engagement.
2. Students are impacted by an advisor's level of work engagement.
3. The workplace culture influences an advisor's level of work engagement.
4. Using narrative inquiry allows the advisor's voice and experiences to be heard and validated.
5. Advisors adopt and/or develop some kind of strategies to handle negative factors.

Summary of Frameworks

Guiding this study were the concepts of the JD-R model, which supplied a fundamental grounding for this study, and Waldman and Spangler's (1989, 2004) Determinates of Individual Job Performance model.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001) outlines two general categories of work characteristics, regardless of a specific career field. These two categories are: job demands and job resources. This model is built on the premise that job resources can play a critical role by fostering an employee's growth, learning, and professional development, all of which are fueled by the individual's internal motivation. Since job resources are also vital to an employee's successful accomplishment of work, job resources also play an important external motivational role. Moreover, job resources have the potential to motivate the employee while also leading to a higher level of work engagement and improved performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). "By their nature, engaged individuals have stores of personal and job resources and enhanced

cognitive and behavioral repertoires as a function of their positive emotions” (Kane-Freider, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2013, p. 358).

According to Waldman and Spangler (1989, 2004), the Determinates of Individual Job Performance model focuses solely on individual job performance, rather than organization performance. Individual performance can have a significant impact on collective performance, which is one reason for this model’s significance. This model includes human abilities, motivation, leadership, group processes, and feedback. “A consideration of measurement issues is limited to the variable that impact performance” (Waldman & Spangler, 1989, p. 30). More specifically, the variables examined in this study were Individual variables, Periphery variables, and Outcome variables. Individual variables consist of experience, ability, and motivation. Periphery variables include work environment, leadership behavior, and group processes. Finally, Outcome variables are job performance, job feedback, and personal outcomes (Waldman & Spangler, 1989). This study’s founding on the JD-R model gave it a grounded theoretical framework designed to make it the most thorough study possible.

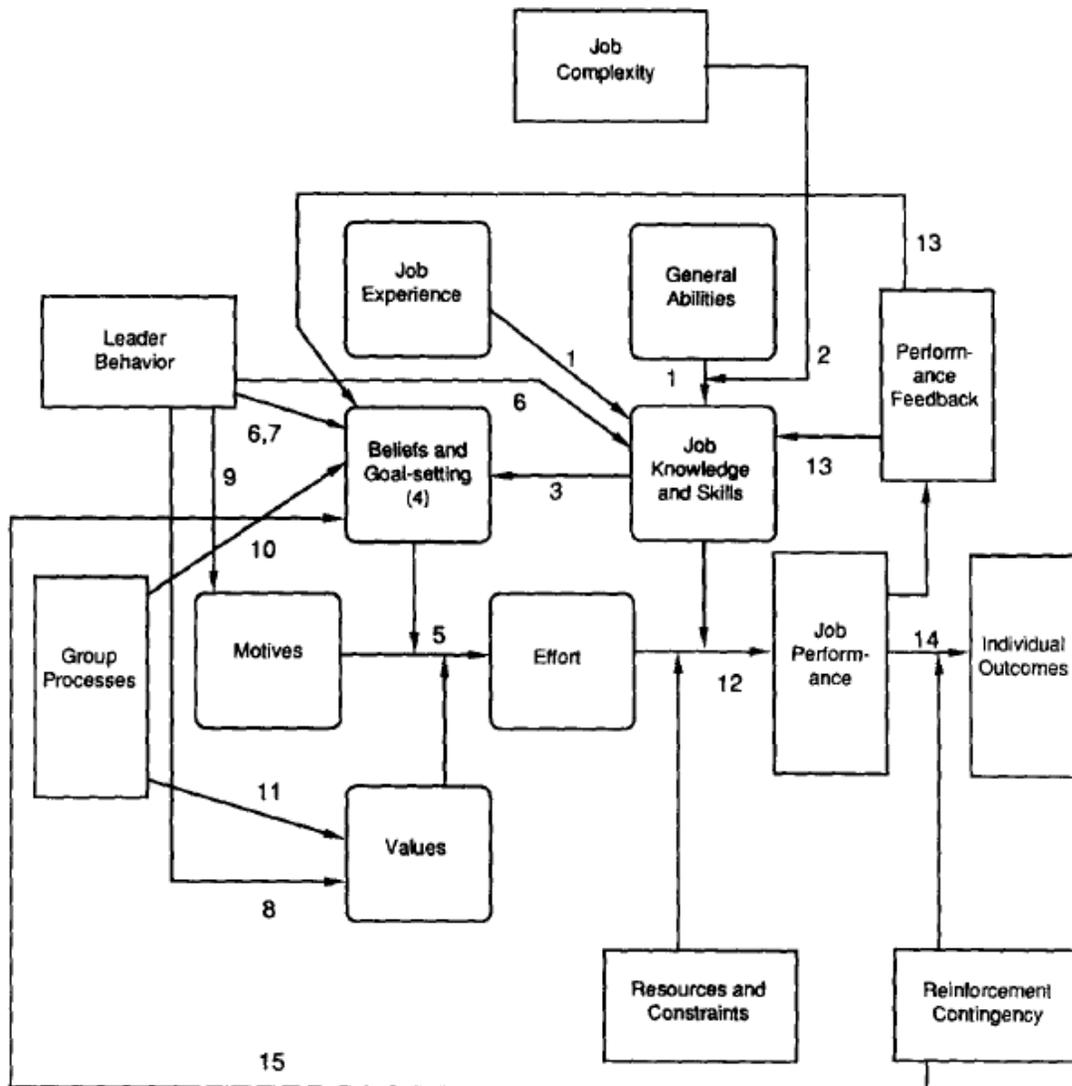


Figure 1.1: The Determinates of Individual Job Performance—Waldman and Spangler Model. *Used with permission.*

Source: Waldman, D., & Spangler, W. (1989) Putting together the pieces: A closer look at the determinants of job performance. *Human Performance*, 2(1), 31.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the overall purpose and direction for this study. Chapter 2 offers a review of the relevant literature.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review highlights factors that impact employee engagement and how they can negatively affect an entire organization. Important information from past scholarly work on employee engagement also is reviewed.

Previous Studies of Employee Engagement and Academic Advising

Past studies have been consistent in confirming that job resources such as support from colleagues and leadership, performance feedback, learning and professional development opportunities, job resources, and employee autonomy are positively linked with work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). These are all drivers of work engagement; all can have a significant impact on an employee. “Job resources are assumed to play either an intrinsic motivational role because they foster employees’ growth, learning, and development, or an extrinsic motivational role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008, p. 211). There are also personal resources that are drivers for engagement. Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, and Jackson (2003) explained that, “Personal resources are positive self- evaluations that are linked to resiliency and refer to individuals’ sense of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully” (p. 633). Furthermore, engaged employees have personal resources such as self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, meaningful coping style, and a positive self-esteem that help them impact their work environment and achieve success in the workplace (Bakker et al., 2008).

Lynch (2002) conducted the NACADA Academic Advising Survey of 2000, which was carried out electronically by way of the NACADA Web site through Kansas State University

(where Lynch is a professor) between April 18 and May 31, 2000. A total of 2,695 respondents completed surveys, which sought information on the following: academic training, compensation, professional development opportunities, and technical support. Lynch explained in more detail about the parameters he set going forward for the topic of advisor training and compensation: “For the analyses of advisor training and advisor compensation, I included only those respondents who indicated that they held 12-month, full-time positions with the titles of academic advisor or advising specialist” (p. 45). For the analyses of professional development and support, Lynch (2002) assessed two categories in relation to advisor support and identified these as “professional development resources and technological, print, and other support available” (p. 68). For example, with regard to job resources, Lynch (2002) reported that, “Advisors from public universities and colleges reported higher than expected access to computer technology while those from private universities and colleges reported lower than expected access to both hardware and software” (p. 70).

However, with regard to professional development resources, it was reported that, ‘advisors from research universities reported less than expected support for travel to regional and state conferences and workshops’ (p. 68). Generally speaking, what Lynch (2002) found was that opportunities and availability varied significantly in the areas of training, compensation, professional development, and technical support from institution to institution; however, at the larger universities there was a greater expectation that each of these would be greater comparatively.

In a study conducted by Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) involving 7,939 business units in 36 companies, a meta-analysis was utilized to examine the relationship at the business-unit level between employee satisfaction and engagement. It also looked at the business-unit

outcomes for customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee turnover, and accidents.

Harter et al. (2002) discovered the following about the connection between employee engagement and job performance:

Generalizable relationships large enough to have substantial practical value were found between unit-level employee satisfaction-engagement and these business-unit outcomes.

One implication is that changes in management practices that increase employee satisfaction may increase business-unit outcomes, including profit (p. 268).

One way in which engagement has been defined is as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Bakker, 2010, p. 229).

Bakker and Leiter (2010) defined vigor as a “high level of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence in facing difficulties” (p. 41). They defined dedication as “being strongly involved in one’s work, and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge” (p. 41). They explained absorption as “being fully concentrated on and happily engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work” (p. 41).

Work engagement also has been termed as employee engagement, since the two expressions are similar. Baumgardner and Myers (2012) noted that employees who are consistently engaged by their work often describe their experience with their employer as positive. When employees feel valued by their company, they feel they are able to grow professionally as well as personally by the experience. Employees who are challenged in positive ways feel connected to their work and are able to see the outcomes of all of their hard work. Therefore, a workforce that is engaged contains many employees who are cheerfully reaching

organizational goals for the mere pleasure of it and with enthusiasm. According to Bakker (2013):

. . . because of their positive attitude and activity level, engaged employees create their own positive feedback in terms of appreciation, recognition, and success. Although engaged employees do feel tired after a long day of hard work, they describe their fatigue as a rather pleasant state because it is associated with positive accomplishments (p. 2).

Bakker et al. (2013) reaffirmed that “Organizations have become more and more interested in work engagement, since the research evidence shows that engaged workers perform better” (p. 2).

In a recent study, Bakker et al. (2013) conducted a test involving 84 female school principals and 190 teachers, which examined the central process proposed by the Job Demands – Resources model of work engagement. Bakker et al. (2013) hypothesized that job resources do in fact have a positive impact on creativity and charismatic leadership behavior through personal resources, and also through work engagement. “Schools in particular and organizations in general should be interested in work engagement, since engaged leaders are perceived by their followers to be creative performers” (Bakker et al., 2013, p. 17). This study’s findings illustrate the importance of a resourceful work environment and bring to the forefront the process through which personal resources directly impact improved job performance (Bakker et al., 2013).

In a study by Mauno, Kinnunen, and Ruokolainen (2007), it was determined that resources do in fact predict improvements in engagement. Among this study’s findings was that job control was actually an excellent best predictor of vigor, dedication and absorption.

Schulenberg et al. (2008) asserted that, “Engaging students is central to academic advising, but academic advising is much more than working directly with students... The concerns and

interests of academic advisors should span many areas of higher education, and advisors...” (p. 44). Furthermore, a study conducted by Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz (1997) revealed that employees who view their work as a calling were more inclined to engage in such ‘job crafting’ behaviors due to their feeling that this was a central part of their lives relative to even hobbies and friends. Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) stated that these employees “would generally be associated with greater life, health, and job satisfaction and with better health” (p. 29). Additionally, according to Wrzesniewski et al. (1997), those employees who felt a strong connection to their work ranked job satisfaction significantly higher than those who did not, and these employees missed substantially less days of work.

In related research, Dillon and Fisher (2000) conducted a qualitative study at a medium-size university in the U.S. Midwest where advising services involved both professional and faculty advisors interested in collecting data about advisor viewpoints. One topic examined was contributors to and distractions from successful advising. Dillon and Fisher (2000) said, “Advisors suggested that advising can be improved if steps were focused on advisor knowledge...They also suggested that advisor knowledge can be improved through more training” (p. 20). Training and leadership supporting professional development is imperative to further refining advisors’ skills and, in turn, helping to improve overall performance.

Factors that Influence Job Performance

Engelbrecht’s (2006) qualitative research among midwives in Denmark showed how engagement translates into performance and employee behavior. Engelbrecht asked his participants to describe a highly engaged colleague from their perspective. These interviews revealed that employees felt that an engaged midwife is one who exudes a high level of energy and maintains a positive attitude within their department, especially in those areas in which

morale is considered low and employees are generally less happy. Engelbrecht (2006) said, "...positive work experiences - being frequent in midwifery – are regarded as an important resource and buffer against high demands and otherwise low resources (financial reward, recognition from supervisors, colleagues, and clients, etc.)" (p. 247). Employees who experience positive emotions create a highly engaged environment in the organization that leads to better performance and productivity (Bakker, 2009). When describing job performance, Strauss (1968) stated that, "Early human relationists viewed the morale- productivity relationship quite simply: higher morale would lead to improved productivity" (p. 264).

It was noted earlier that many interconnected features such as morale, engagement, and job satisfaction influence an employee's job performance. According to Bakker and Leiter (2010), there are several approaches to consider in the way of improving one's job performance and these approaches may vary depending on the professional position. There are many ways to define job performance—some measure job performance entirely on productivity, while others consider multiple factors such as customer service approval, safety, capability to work as a team, and ability to lead. These different ways of approaching job performance may also be referred to "...as the *process* of performance, the *outcome* of performance, or both" (Bakker et al., 2010, p. 148). There is very little question about the ways in which degree of work engagement influences overall job performance. Many recent studies distinctly prove that work engagement does influence job performance (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010). Those employees who demonstrate a higher level of work engagement out-perform those employees who do not, according to Bakker (2011):

To date, several studies have shown that work engagement is positively related to job performance (e.g., in-role performance that is, officially required outcomes and behaviors

that directly serve the goals of the organization; creativity; organizational citizenship behavior). For example, Bakker, Demerouti, and Verbeke (2004) showed that engaged employees received higher ratings from their colleagues on in-role and extra-role performance (discretionary behaviors on the part of an employee that are believed to directly promote the effective functioning of an organization, without necessarily directly influencing a person's target productivity), indicating that engaged employees perform well and are willing to go the extra mile (p. 267).

Bakker (2011) asserted that, "There are at least four reasons why engaged workers perform better than disengaged workers. First, engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including gratitude, joy, and enthusiasm" (p. 267). Positive emotions felt by engaged employees include enthusiasm, joy, and even appreciation.

Second, engaged employees experience improved health, which translates into better job performance. Bakker (2011) said, "This means that they can focus and dedicate all their skills and energy resources to their work" (p. 267). In turn, engaged employees are better able to focus on the task at hand without distractions and concentrate their energy on their work in a positive way, rather than a negative one.

Third, Bakker (2011) explained the ways in which engaged employees experience a higher level of performance due to feeling empowered to build their own pathway to success. In other words, they feel able to generate the resources necessary to complete high-quality work. Barnes and Collier (2013) reminded us that, "...firms are constantly evaluating different attributes of potential and current employees in the hopes of attracting, retaining, and rewarding key employees...the construct of work engagement has garnered interest as an important indicator of employee performance" (p. 1). This is because these employees take the initiative to

get the work completed and do not necessarily wait for their supervisor to tell them what needs to be done because “...engaged employees create their own job and personal resources” (Bakker, 2011, p. 267).

Managers play a key role, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Rothland et al. (2011) offered a few ideas for those in management positions to consider in helping them to generate more engagement among employees and to also improve job performance. The first is psychological safety. “Psychological safety refers to being able to employ one’s self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career—it allows an employee or team member to engage in interpersonal risk-taking” (Rothland et al., 2011, p. 63). Leadership has a critical role within an organization and within a team. Rothland et al. (2011) pointed to “a second factor for increasing work engagement [which] is the balance between the demands and resources that an employee has” (p. 64). This truly is a balance since both job demands and resources can have such a significant impact on an employee’s level of engagement. Another important factor is self-esteem and self- concept. “Self-esteem, efficacy, locus of control, identity, and perceived social impact may be critical drivers of an individual’s psychological availability as evident in the attention, absorption, and energy directed toward their work” (p. 64).

Finally, engaged employees can often inspire co-workers and generate more motivation within their work area, which ultimately can have a positive impact on shared projects while creating a positive teamwork culture. Bakker (2011) claimed that, “Since in most organizations performance is the result of collaborative effort, the engagement of one person may transfer to others and indirectly improve team performance” (p. 267).

These are only some of the benefits associated with employees who are engaged and organizations that foster positive employee engagement. Managers and supervisors play crucial roles in fostering engagement. Bakker (2010) said that, "...leaders have a special role in fostering work engagement among their followers. It is to be expected that considerate leadership, and more particularly transformational leadership, is successful in accomplishing this" (p. 241). These leaders must evaluate levels of employee engagement (Demerouti, Bakker, Sonnentag, & Fullagar, 2012), to include but not be limited to the level of exhaustion, work disability, employee turnover rate, and absenteeism. Managers can make a significant difference, but only if they are crystal clear on what their organizational needs are and are sincere in their efforts (White, 2012). The potential benefits for the employees, company, and customer are limitless, beginning first with improved work engagement among employees; however, leadership at all levels must be educated on the importance of engagement.

Based on the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Model (Bakker, Demerouti, De Boer, & Schaufeli, 2003; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), regardless of career, there are two primary categories of work characteristics: job demands and job resources. "According to the JD-R model, job resources are functional in achieving work goals and can stimulate personal growth, learning and development" (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2013 p. 7). Both job demands and job resources can have a significant impact on an advisor's level of work engagement. One negative impact could be burnout, which engaged employees are less likely to experience. "Burnout is a work-related syndrome primarily caused by chronic high job demands, poor job resources and insufficient recovery..." (Van Doormen, Houtveen, Langelaan, Bakker, Van Rhenen, & Schaufeli, 2009, p. 323). Burnout is a syndrome that should be taken seriously because it has the potential to have long-term, negative consequences for an individual. Van

Doornen et al. (2009) correlated burnout with an increased risk of emergent cardiovascular disease effects. “Burnout is reaching epidemic proportions in North American workers today. It’s not so much that something has gone wrong with us but rather that there have been fundamental changes in the workplace and the nature of our jobs” (Leiter & Maslach, 1997, p. 1). ‘Burnout,’ according to Ten Brummelhuis, Ter Hoeven, Bakker, and Peper, (2011), “... is a stress syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion and cynicism generally caused by high job demands and a shortage in job resources.” (p. 268). Schaufeli et al. (2008) defined burnout as “a metaphor that is commonly used to describe a state of mental weariness” (p. 175). An upward trend in Employee Cynicism “has been proposed as a new paradigm of employee–employer relations as a result of longer working hours, work intensification, ineffective leadership and management, new deals in the workplace and the continual downsizing and delaying of organizations” (Mills, 2012, p. 201). This is something that leadership in particular should care about and counteract by implementing strategies for improving employee engagement, which are discussed more in depth later in this chapter.

Professional development training and opportunities for growth seem to also be a challenge for advisors. Habley and Morales (1998) advised that “many institutions are providing a only minimum of training to those involved in advising.’ (p. 4). Koring (2005) explained that, “Sufficient advisor training is not supplied for three simple reasons: time, money, and lack of training for the trainers.” Therefore, a lack of meaningful training for advisors prevents them from learning new strategies to cope with the many challenges they encounter in their work with students. This can frustrate advisors and cause them additional stress. Howey (2008) reported that, “Educators across the country are frustrated with the challenge of how to motivate the ever-increasing number of freshmen students entering college who are psychologically, socially, and

academically unprepared for the demands of college life” (p. 1). The fact is that, according to Habley (1981), working with an advisor is the only chance that students have on campus for continuing, one-on-one interaction with a professional at a higher education institution.

Academic advisors not only play a critical role but are entrusted with a responsibility held by no other higher education professional, which should warrant an appropriate investment in their training and professional development.

Logan and Turman (2003) reported that among advisors:

. . . seldom a day passes in which someone doesn't make a stress-related comment, such as “I'm burned out,” or “I'm under too much stress.” While few of us, if asked, can provide a formal definition of stress, most are all too familiar with how it feels. Simply stated, stress is the physical and emotional condition felt when we are excited, face change, feel powerless, or feel threatened (p. 1).

So, breaking all of this down, burnout can be described as a combination of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion that brings a person to a state of fatigue that can leave them with little energy and diminished focus. Such a state requires a period of rest to recharge in order to return to the state felt prior to falling victim to burnout. Leiter and Maslach (2005) explained that, “Burnout is far more than feeling blue or having a bad day. It is a chronic state of being out of synch with your job, and that can be a significant crisis in your life” (p. 2).

Burnout can have negative impacts on an advisor, their family, their department, and all of their students. “Work engagement has also been shown to be associated with positive spillover effects way from work...theorists have long posited that involvement in multiple roles has positive spillover effects and enhances functioning in both work and family roles” (Mills, 2012, p. 1157). Leaders must take it upon themselves to understand what burnout is and what causes it,

and engage in the development of strategies to prevent it. The health and well-being of advisors is important. The strength of a department and meeting the needs of the students depend on it. “In research among spouses, it has been shown that work engagement is not only important for one’s own performance, but also for one’s partner’s performance” (Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2013, p. 2). Just as an advisor’s partner’s performance can be influenced, so can their colleague’s engagement level. According to Rodriguez-Munoz et al. (2013), “In the work setting, there is evidence showing that work engagement is transmitted between colleagues on a daily basis” (p. 2). Furthermore, a positive and productive work environment is more likely to have a profound effect on the level of engagement among advisors.

Moreover, Mills (2012) concluded that, “Given that work engagement is essentially active participation at work in that individuals are dedicated to, absorbed in, and invigorated by their work, it would stand to reason that engaged individuals would be better able to function effectively outside of work as well” (p. 1157). Happy and healthy employees are better assets for the organization as a whole and are better for their families, so there is much reason for leadership to be interested in the factors that affect their employees’ work engagement.

Strategies for Improving Employee Engagement

All work environments must be positive; leaders should work to foster a professional culture that engages employees. “With few exceptions, all leaders agree: highly engaged employees outperformed poorly engaged employees. Yet despite the research, the surveys and the focus on engagement, most senior teams report being frustrated at the lack of progress when it comes to building a culture of engagement” (White, 2012, p. 1). Work engagement is especially important in education and for those academic advisors who are such a critical resource for university students. Bakker, Oerlemans, and Ten Brummelhuis (2013) explained

that, “Organizations have become increasingly interested in how to develop employee engagement. Although, to date only very few interventions to improve engagement exist and have been tested” (p. 56). However, there are strategies to improve employee engagement; if implemented properly, they could boast positive results. Schulenberg et al. (2008) described some of the factors that impact academic advisors’ work environment in a positive way:

Each individual has carried these perspectives and scholarly interests into his or her work: Some advisors study multicultural issues; others are interested in the use of rhetorical theory; others consider the shape of higher education in other countries. These perspectives create a vibrant work atmosphere in which intellectual engagement in issues that relate to higher education is valued. (p. 48).

Through continuous quality improvement, which is an integrated, systematic approach, leadership and advisors can work to improve both individual and organizational work performance. The hallmark of this approach is the importance of cooperation rather than competition (Higginson, Trainer, & Youth, 1994). Research supports the fact that employees who feel their experiences and contributions are valued in their workplace by leadership, colleagues, and the populations they serve are more likely to be happy and perform better than those who do not. “Virtually all studies on work engagement offer evidence for the benefits of the experience. Engaged employees have psychological capital, seem to create their own resources, perform better, and have happier clients” (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011, p. 17). A commitment to work together in order to create a positive workplace culture by administrators, supervisors, and each advisor should matter greatly. Hackel (2010) explained that, “You need a plan to create a culture of engagement that will become entrenched in the organization. It doesn't happen by accident. It comes about through deliberate, well-thought-out planning and execution”

(p. 19). In the field of academic advising, like any other field, job satisfaction impacts employee engagement, so it's critical for leaders to understand the connection since it has impact on program effectiveness. According to Donnelly (2009), "The job satisfaction of academic advisors is an important measure of academic-advising program effectiveness" (p. 34).

Academic advisors' performance is important, especially due to their relationship with students.

One frequently explored determining factor of job performance is job satisfaction (Moser & Chong, 1995). Moreover, leadership has a responsibility not only towards their advisors but also to their students to do their best to create a positive culture of engagement for everyone.

Those individuals who set policies should lead the way and set an example for others to follow.

Mills (2012) pointed to two types of psychological contracts:

. . . transactional contracts relating to a fixed term exchange (e.g., financial rewards) and relational contracts linked to open-ended relationships, characterized by emotional exchange (e.g., personal growth and development). In order to re-engage employees in this age of anxiety in which an estimated 6% of the workforce are unemployed, 25% are underemployed, and 33% worry about losing their jobs in the future, there is a need to return to more relational contracts where mutual commitment is built over time and is dependent on promises being honored and trust earned, not induced (p. 205).

Trust is something that truly is earned—it cannot be bought and cannot be forced. Issues facing organizational leadership extend beyond compensation to encompass basic human relations; employees want and need to be able to trust their leaders. Lack of trust is a roadblock to establishing strong and positive employee engagement. "When you ignore engagement issues in your organization you risk spending more money and time on communication and field support, all in an effort to reach the unengaged and actively disengaged" (Hackel, 2010, p. 18). These

leaders set the priorities and provide resources to support academic advisors in carrying out their duties. They set the tone for the first-line supervisors to follow; these individuals then set the same tone for their employees—in this case, advisors. “Consistent with these notions about the motivational role of job resources, several studies have shown a positive relationship between job resources and work engagement...” (Bakker et al., 2009, p. 6). Hackel (2010) noted that it is also crucial to keep in mind that “...even when you achieve a culture of engagement the work has only just started. It isn't something you can touch, but it will result in improved performance...” (p. 18). It is undeniable that job resources do contribute to the creation of a culture of work engagement and its continuation in the future is imperative.

Organizations can use several instruments to measure levels of employee engagement and, by doing so, implement strategies to improve engagement among their employees. Many organizations have taken the initiative to measure employee engagement in an effort to improve productivity, profitability, turnover and safety (Little, & Little, 2006).

In order to ensure that the process of collecting data related to engagement is as simple as possible, several different methods have been developed. These take the shape of surveys, questionnaires, and scales. These types of tools assist human resource professionals in identifying problems within their companies and taking steps to resolve them. “But surveys, in and of themselves, don't resolve business issues or promote employment engagement. Asking employees about the problem is only the first phase of resolving engagement issues. Going back to them and asking for the answers is the second” (Woolf, 2005, p. 6). Another well-known instrument used to measure employee engagement is the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which was developed to help HR managers and organization leaders (Gilliland, Steiner, & Skarlicki, 2007). The UWES was created by Schaufeli and Bakker in 2003 and was

named after the university at which it was developed – Utrecht University, The Netherlands. The UWES is also commonly referred to as the Work and Well-Being Survey. Since its inception, UWES has become one of the most utilized surveys for measuring work engagement and its variables: vigor (VI), dedication (DE) and absorption (AB). The UWES includes statements about how an individual feels at work.

There is also the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which is an instrument used to measure burnout and its primary dimensions include: exhaustion, cynicism, and personal inefficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001, p. 402). MBI was originally created as a Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) for health care organizations engaged in nursing, social work, psychology and ministry (Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). There are a total of three other versions of the MBI: MBI General Survey (MBI-GS), MBI Educators Survey (MBI-ES) and MBI Student Survey (MBI-SS).

The last instrument to be discussed in this chapter is the increasingly popular Gallup Q (Q12), which was formulated by the Gallup Organization to measure engagement. Gallup Q also has the capability to identify areas within the organization that need improvement. It focuses on general satisfaction items in addition to 12 others that relate to an individual's job satisfaction. The scale ranges from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 6 ("don't know/does not apply") (Harter et al., 2002). The questions focus on several topics such as organizational productivity, profitability, employee retention, and customer satisfaction.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has pulled together several topics revolving around work engagement. An engaged workforce is described as one of vigor, dedication and absorption—the exact opposite of a burned-out worker. The responsibility of organizational leaders and supervisors in creating an engaged workplace environment was also explored, in addition to long-term sustainability. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model was reviewed, along with other instruments available for measuring work engagement.

Discussion focused on how leadership can implement strategies to improve employee engagement and avoid burnout. This was especially valuable because of the significant relationship among employee health, work life and family life well-being. Schulenberg et al. (2008) stated that, “Advising professionals should be conducting research on these topics, seeking grant money to research and implement programs, and publishing results in diverse academic journals in which this field is presently underrepresented” (p. 51). Since the field of academic advising plays a crucial role in higher education, it is imperative to continue examining the factors that impact academic advisors’ work engagement, which in turn has a significant impact on advisors’ overall job performance.

Chapter 3

Methodology

A description of the methodology followed in this study is offered in this chapter. The following topics are discussed: purpose of the study, research design, research questions, data collection, and data analysis. There is a range of methods of discovery in research. Different paths of inquiry are designed to discover different types of information and to gather further insights into a particular subject matter. With so many different research methods and approaches available, a decision has to be made—which of these many methods/approaches is most appropriate for the study? A qualitative, narrative inquiry approach was selected for this study.

Purpose of Study

As discussed by Merriam and Cafferella (1999), the intention of qualitative research is to gain an understanding of how individuals make meaning of a specific phenomenon. This narrative inquiry investigated the factors that impact the work engagement of academic advisors.

Research Questions

The research questions that framed this study related to the experiences of professional academic advisors. The questions were as follows: a.) What defines the professional academic advisors' work engagement experience; b.) What factors contribute to the manifestation of highly engaged academic advisors; c.) What self-reported issues negatively impact the work engagement of academic advisors; and d.) What, if any, coping strategies do academic advisors employ to address those issues.

Research Design

This study utilized the narrative inquiry approach of qualitative research. Narrative theory is a consequence of Dewey's (1938) identification of the value of one's experience and its meaning as it pertains to the field of education. Narrative is retrospective because it views prior experiences in one's life (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). "It is connected, relational, and constructivist orientation to knowledge. This stands in contrast to the positivist approach to knowledge that has become associated and favored by much of the academic community in the Western world throughout the last century" (Rossiter & Clark, 2007, p. 16). It focuses on the meaning given to one's lived experiences and causes for reflection. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "Formalists begin inquiry in theory, whereas narrative inquirers tend to begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories" (p. 40). This research included data collected from three interviews conducted with each participant over a period of time.

In an effort to manage the data, a plan was devised to continually process data in a systematic and methodical way. Practical and informative narratives for the profession of academic advising were collected that offered information beneficial to this profession, as well as higher education in general. Narrative Inquiry provides an intimate inside view of lived experience in the attempt to uncover new meaning within research. According to Dewey (1938), "The principle that development of experience comes about through interaction means that education is essentially a social process" (p. 36). Narrative inquiry is a valuable method of research; it fosters a relationship between the participant and the researcher. This rarely occurs in statistical research, which does not generally allow for this. "Narrative is the study of how humans make meaning of experiences by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves

that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 24). This approach offers a basic understanding and provides a knowledge base through others' experiences that otherwise would not be available. “Narrative inquiry is stories lived and told,” according to Clandinin and Connolly (2000, p. 20). Creswell (2007) said that “In narrative research, a key theme has been the turn toward the relationship between the researcher and the research in which both parties will learn and change in the encounter” (p. 57).

Seidman's (2006) interview approach was utilized in this study. The purpose of this interview technique is to have the advisor reconstruct their experiences as these apply to the context of the interview questions. Seidman (2006) recommended a sequence of three interviews, with each focusing on: life history, details of participants' experiences, and reflection on the meaning of the experiences. These are further discussed later in this chapter.

A qualitative approach, unlike a quantitative approach, allows the researcher to obtain one-on-one access to the interviewee. The two are close enough in proximity to physically witness their personal accounts and make observations that otherwise would not have been possible. Data collection methods for qualitative research mainly consist of, but are not limited to, observable events, analysis, and interviews. Since the researchers are conducting these events, Patton (2002) suggested that the researchers themselves are a research instrument throughout a qualitative study. “The open, emergent nature of qualitative inquiry means a lack of standardization; there are not clear criteria to package into neat research steps” (Glens, 2006, p. 19). The openness of this approach is positive and beneficial for a deeper understanding of the research. It actually “...allows the researcher to approach the inherent intricacies of social interaction, to honor complexity, and to respect it in its own right. To do justice to complexity, researchers avoid simplifying social phenomena and instead explore the range of behavior”

(Glens, 2006, p. 19). The experiences of the academic advisors matter greatly to the journey to further understand how their positions, workplaces, leadership, and interactions influence their work engagement. This matters for several reasons but the two primary ones for the purposes of this study were the: impact on them personally and effect on the quality of advising/support provided to their students.

The method within qualitative research selected for this study was narrative inquiry, which centers on the experiences of the individual as expressed through their own voices (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Rossiter & Clark, 2007). Since the goal of this study was to learn about the work engagement of professional academic advisors, it was most insightful to listen to them talk about the factors that influence their engagement and impact their capacity as academic advisors.

Sample

Study participants were selected through purposeful sampling. This sampling method was used because “particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 235). The participants were selected based upon their status as professional academic advisors identified as Outstanding Advisors on the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) web site and because their current employment was at a regionally accredited university within the United States. They worked with either decided or undecided undergraduate students.

The potential study population was fairly substantial and easily accessible because their contact information is available on their institutional website. The researcher also drew upon own experiences as a part-time academic advisor for the Division of Undergraduate Studies at Penn State University in making contact using purposeful sampling. NACADA has a set of

criteria for those advisors who ultimately win the award and those award winners are publicly identified on their website according to the year they won and their institution of affiliation.

Nominations are evaluated on evidence of qualities and practices that distinguish the nominee as being excellent in their advising/outstanding academic advising-primary role. The evidence and criteria listed by NACADA (n.d.) are as follows:

1. Strong interpersonal skills
2. Availability to advisees, faculty, or staff
3. Frequency of contact with advisees
4. Appropriate referral activity
5. Use and dissemination of appropriate information sources
6. Evidence of student success rate, by advisor or department
7. Caring, helpful attitude toward advisees, faculty, and staff
8. Meeting advisees in informal settings
9. Participation in and support of intrusive advising to build strong relationships with advisees
10. Monitoring of student progress toward academic and career goals
11. Mastery of institutional regulations, policies, and procedures
12. Ability to engage in, promote, and support developmental advising
13. Evidence of working in an academic advising program that supports NACADA's Core Values
14. Evidence of working in an advising program that reflects the standards of good practice in the CAS Standards and Guidelines for Academic Advising
15. Participation in and support of advisor development programs

16. Perception by colleagues of nominee's advising skills

17. Institutional recognition of nominee for outstanding advising

Five professional academic advisors were selected to participate in this study. The search for participants began with visiting NACADA's website and viewing regional award winner listings. Participants were selected randomly by scanning lists for advisors who were selected in the category of excellence in advising/outstanding academic advising-primary role. The five selected participants had demonstrated excellence in advising based on the criteria outlined by NACADA for being recognized for such an honor. All advisors were initially contacted using a Target Population Letter (see Appendix A). This letter contained a summary of the background and purpose of this research, and an invitation to participate in the study. See Appendix B for a copy of the Target Population Letter for the Pilot Study. Once the advisor responded to the initial contact and showed interest in participating, an Informed Consent form was sent to them (see Appendix C). The individual interviews began once the Informed Consent form was signed by the advisor and received by the researcher.

Data Collection

The interview approach for this study was structured on the interviewing methods outlined by Seidman (2006): "this model of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing involving conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant" (p. 16). For this study, the intent was to go in-depth in relation to participants' experiences by means of open-ended questions. This approach afforded the advisors an opportunity to share their experiences, stories, and insights in a comfortable environment. A series of three sessions were held with each advisor, for an average of 60 to 90 minutes, as a way to ascertain and develop the context of lived experiences. See Appendix D for the Semi-Structured Interview Questions. Since this

approach goes beyond other methods such as focus groups, surveys, and others (Johnson, 2002), it allowed the interviewer to gain a deeper understanding of the advisors' experiences. However, due to time and geographical challenges, the length and interview forum varied. For instance, some of the interviews were conducted on a Saturday over the telephone. This posed a challenge in some cases because some participants were multi-tasking. They wanted to participate in the study and were committed to the research; however, they also had families and children to care for. In such cases, the interview lasted a shorter amount of time, and responses were not as lengthy. There were also distractions and noise in the background during some of the interviews. This fact alone further indicated that although the advisors were very busy, they were also engaged in their work and happy to support the study as a participant. They were willing to give of their time, even if it meant juggling multiple responsibilities.

The three interview sessions had three parts: (a) focused life history, (b) details of current work experiences, and (c) follow-up: reflection on the meaning. During the focused life history interview, the interviewer's goal was to "put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time" (Seidman, 2006, p. 17). During the first interview session, the primary objective was to focus on how the participant came to be an academic advisor. A review of the advisor's life history up until the time he or she entered their profession as an advisor was discussed. During the second session, the details of the advisor's current work experiences emerged as they pertained to the topic of this research. The goal was to learn what it was like for the participant to be an academic advisor and discover details about the important work they were doing. At the third and final contact, the advisors reflected on what these experiences meant, and made intellectual and emotional associations between their life and work (Seidman, 2006).

Seidman (2006) recommended that the interviews occur in 90-minute blocks and advised taking 3 days to 1 week between each interview, based on his experiences; however, for this study process, the interviews ranged from 15 to 45 minutes with a 3- to 10-day gap in between. This allowed the interviews to remain connected without losing information previously established in the other interviews. This process also took into consideration the participants' schedules and enabled maximum respect of participants' time. Seidman (2006) said that, "...it is not a perfect world. It is almost always better to conduct an interview under less than ideal conditions than not to conduct one at all" (p. 22). It is important to recognize that due to time constraints and participants' schedules, interviews may range in time and occur on different dates depending on the availability of each advisor. See Appendix D for a list of the interview questions and relevant notes.

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis involves examining the content of stories, as well as determining how and why events occur (Riesman & Speedy, 2007). In an effort to be as thorough as possible, a multi-stage data-analysis approach was used that incorporated Sideman's (2006) method of analysis of thematic and interpretation of narratives, as well as Fraser's (2004) analysis approach. There were four stages of data analysis: (1) focused listening of narratives, (2) transcription, (3) coding for themes and interpreting participant transcripts and (4) exploring similarities and differences among participants. Utilizing a multi-phased analysis method ensured more in-depth understanding of participants' identities and their experiences as professional academic advisors. These phases are described individually below.

Phase One: Listening to Narratives

Each interview was digitally recorded. According to Fraser (2004), “During the interviews and then after they have been conducted, the first phase of the analysis may involve hearing the stories narrated and experiencing the emotion of participants and interviewers” (p. 187). The interviewer also took some notes while listening to participants’ narratives about a range of thoughts and emotions that emerged during this time.

Phase Two: Transcription

The second phase of this analysis was divided into two activities: (1) detailed transcription and (2) deciphering of the stories.

Transcription

Step one in the second phase of analysis involved transcribing the digital recordings from each interview. “Transcriptions are useful because they offer a more accurate record of the interview than memory alone. Transcriptions are also necessary for researchers to analyze the stories line by line” (Fraser, 2004, p. 187). This is important because such details enable the researcher to fully capture the meaning of the story and the individual storytelling style of the narrator.

Deciphering Stories

Each individual transcript was reviewed for stories—this activity required time for significant interpretation. To establish stories within transcripts, they were examined for ideas expressed (Fraser, 2004, p. 189) that had plots. Although some narrative researchers suggest that specific plots be used (i.e., comic or tragic; Polkinghorne, 1988), a more encompassing approach was applied here in identifying themes by focusing on experiences the narrators felt were meaningful to them and had the most impact.

Phase Three: Coding for Themes and Interpreting Participant Transcripts

In phase three of the analysis, collected data were coded. This included coding words, phrases, and concepts that repeatedly surfaced. Data were coded not only for frequency, but for importance. The latter code meant that the advisors mentioned its importance. A review of these revealed themes. Interview transcriptions were read several times and analyzed. Research notes were written while doing this in order to keep track of the meaning. Each individual transcript was compared and contrasted, which aided in categorizing each group of stories according to commonalities. This assisted in establishing codes based on topics that emerged from participant stories.

Phase Four: Similarities and Differences among Participants

In this fourth and final phase, similarities and differences that emerged during phase three were examined. Interpretations made during all phases of analysis were used to examine the differences and similarities among and between participants (Fraser, 2004). This is particularly important because through what is essentially comparing and contrasting via in-depth review and critical analysis, the researcher was able to decipher and piece together new information that should have a positive impact on the advising profession.

Research Quality

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research; therefore, there is a stark difference in its quality should be judged. Zhang and Wildenmuth (2009) stated that:

Validity, reliability, and objectivity are criteria used to evaluate the quality of research the conventional positivist research paradigm. As an interpretive method, qualitative content analysis differs from the positivists' tradition in its fundamental assumptions,

research purposes, and inferences processes, thus making the conventional criteria unsuitable for judging its research results (p. 314).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recognized this gap and proposed new criteria for properly evaluating qualitative research. These criteria are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Two approaches were utilized to make certain the data collection and analysis of this study were credible. The first was member checking; the second was investigator triangulation. Member checking, according to Lewis-Beck, Bryman, and Futing (2004), is “Also called member check and respondent validation, member validation is a procedure largely associated with Qualitative Research, whereby a researcher submits materials relevant to an investigation for checking by the people who were the source of those materials” (p. 1). This approach ensures that information has been captured accurately and provides an additional step in building trust between the participant and the researcher. The second approach was investigator triangulation. “Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives” (Guion et al., 2011, p. 1). When applied to the investigator, this process involves using multiple investigators in the process of analysis. Lombard, Snyder-Duchy, and Bracken (2004) opined that, “...the number of reliability coders (which must be 2 or more) and whether or not they include the researcher(s)” (p. 4). For this study and for the purposes of Intercoder Reliability, Dr. Edger Yoder, who is a scholar with over 30 years of experience in research and higher education, acted as the second coder. Intercoder reliability is critical for qualitative research and was an important stage for this study. “Intercoder reliability is the widely used term for the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion” (Lombard et al., 2004, p. 2). Different types of coding software are

available; however, for this study each transcript was coded manually. Although this can be more labor-intensive, for the quality of this study, this was the best approach. Guion et al. (2011) stated that, “The findings from each evaluator would then be compared to develop a broader and deeper understanding of how the different investigators view the issue. If the findings from the different evaluators arrive at the same conclusion, then our confidence in the findings would be heightened” (p. 2).

With regard to ensuring transferability, according to Zhang et al. (2009), this “refers to the extent to which the researcher’s working hypothesis can be applied to another context...it is not the researcher’s task to provide an index of transferability” (p. 314). In ensuring that conformability is present in qualitative research, it is important to maintain an audit trail. “An audit trail is an ongoing documentation regarding the researchers decisions about the data analysis and collection processes” (McNee &McCabe, 2008, p. 171). For this study, notes taken during participant interviews were also utilized, in addition to member checking, as previously stated, to ensure consistency within this study and confirm conformability. McNee and McCabe (2008) asserted that, “Documentation from the audit trail may include field notes about the process of data collection, theoretical notes about the working hypotheses or developing ideas during the analysis, or methods notes regarding approaches to categorizing or organization data” (p. 171). Once each interview was transcribed, it was sent to the participant for review for member- checking purposes. Each participant had the opportunity to read his or her interview transcript. This was very helpful because not only were words or phrases clarified, but overall accuracy was ensured. Moreover, participants expressed their appreciation because they felt included in the process and respected. This built further trust between the researcher and participants.

Pilot Study

Light, Singer, and Willett (1990) asserted that, “No design is ever so complete that it cannot be improved by a prior, small-scale exploratory study. Pilot studies are almost always worth the time and effort” (p. 213). This is both true in quantitative and qualitative studies alike. Prior exploratory research can be a critical step in clarifying and refining a research study. A Target Population Letter was used to contact participants (see Appendix B). A pilot study was conducted involving two academic advisors who encompassed the criteria noted earlier; the only difference was a smaller proportion of participants—two to be exact. This pilot study followed the methods described throughout this chapter. This pilot study represented an important and fundamental stage during the research process because it assisted in ensuring that the questions asked were understandable and most relevant to the research questions. Based on the outcome of this pilot study and feedback from participants, the questions remained unchanged for the full-scale study.

About the Researcher

The study population was professional academic advisors because the researcher had worked as a summer advisor and consultant with the Division of Undergraduate Studies at Penn State. Although this experience was brief, it was useful in developing the interview questions for this study and knowing where to find resources on the field of advising. This experience also introduced the researcher to the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), which was the database used for participant selection in this study. This background was extremely useful; however, the researcher was careful not to express her own opinions during the interviews or to allow her own experiences as a summer advisor to influence this research. She followed carefully documented steps in collecting and coding data in order to reduce the

influence of her own feelings and experiences on the results, which is critical to the integrity of this research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the methodology used in this research. Details were offered about the purpose of study, as well as the research design and research questions. Additionally, details were provided about the data collection methods applied and the data analysis approach used to analyze the information collected. The data collection process and analysis were guided by narrative methods whose primary objective was to gain an understanding of the meaning assigned by each participant to their lived experiences and described through their stories.

Chapter 4

Findings of Study

Chapter 3 included a description of the use of qualitative research techniques, specifically narrative inquiry, to explore the factors that influenced academic advisors' engagement. Five professional academic advisors who currently work at universities within the United States participated in this study. To discover relevant factors that may impact engagement among academic advisors, a semi-structured interview was first developed based on the research questions and literature review. Then, all interviews were independently coded and analyzed by two researchers, focusing on the emphasis and importance the participants connected to the themes that emerged from answers to the interview questions. The advisors who were interviewed were from four different states and five different university campuses. These states were: Illinois, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. As explained earlier, in analyzing the narratives a line-by-line coding method was used.

According to Patton (2002), "meaning-making also comes from comparing stories" (p. 478); by telling their stories advisors have the opportunity to recount emotions and experiences they may otherwise would not be available. In this chapter, study findings are presented according to the major themes that emerged during the coding of the narratives. Commonalities and differences across the narratives are then discussed. Prior to presenting these findings, the academic advisors are introduced in brief by years of experience, education level, and student population(s) with whom they work. Names have been changed and certain information has been masked to protect the privacy of those who participated in this study.

Participant Overview

Raquel

Gender: Female

Experience: Over 12 years

Education: Master's degree

Primary Student Population: Non-Traditional/Veterans and Military

Sophia

Gender: Female

Experience: Over 5 years

Education: Master's degree

Primary Student Population: Traditional

Wilma

Gender: Female

Experience: Over 20 years

Education: Master's degree

Primary Student Population: Traditional and Non-Traditional/Virtual Advising

Rogan

Gender: Male

Experience: Over 10 years

Education: Master's degree

Primary Student Population: Non-Traditional/Virtual Advising

Bryson

Gender: Male

Experience: Over 12 years

Education: Master's degree

Primary Student Population: Traditional and Non-Traditional/Adult Students

Results

This section reports study results according to factors that impact the academic advisor's level of work engagement. In the analysis of collected data, six major themes emerged. In the following reporting of results, original statements pertaining to that theme provided by participants during the data collection phase of this study are included. In some cases, the extent and degree of emphasis, coupled with the frequency of certain topics that arose, led to the recognition of certain topics as important themes.

Summary of Themes

Theme 1: Positive Experiences with Advisors

Theme 2: Desire to Help Others

Theme 3: Strategies for Handling Stressful Times

Theme 4: Additional Duties and Responsibilities

Theme 5: Leadership Support and Understanding

Theme 6: Training and Development Opportunities

All advisors who participated remained in the study for all three parts of the interview process. Of the five, three were female and two were male. One advisor had 20+ years of

experience, three had 10 + years of experience, and one had 5+ years of experience in their chosen field. All advisors had a master's degree.

Line-by-line, manual coding takes not only a great deal of time but energy. Each participant's response was coded. The researcher first read through each interview once to familiarize herself with the content and absorb the information. She then read through each interview a second time while coding its content. While coding, she looked for commonalities and themes. She checked for frequency and was mindful of outliers. The themes emerged naturally through the examination of open coding. See Appendix H for an example of how coding was accomplished for this study.

RESULTS OF CODING
Coding and Themes

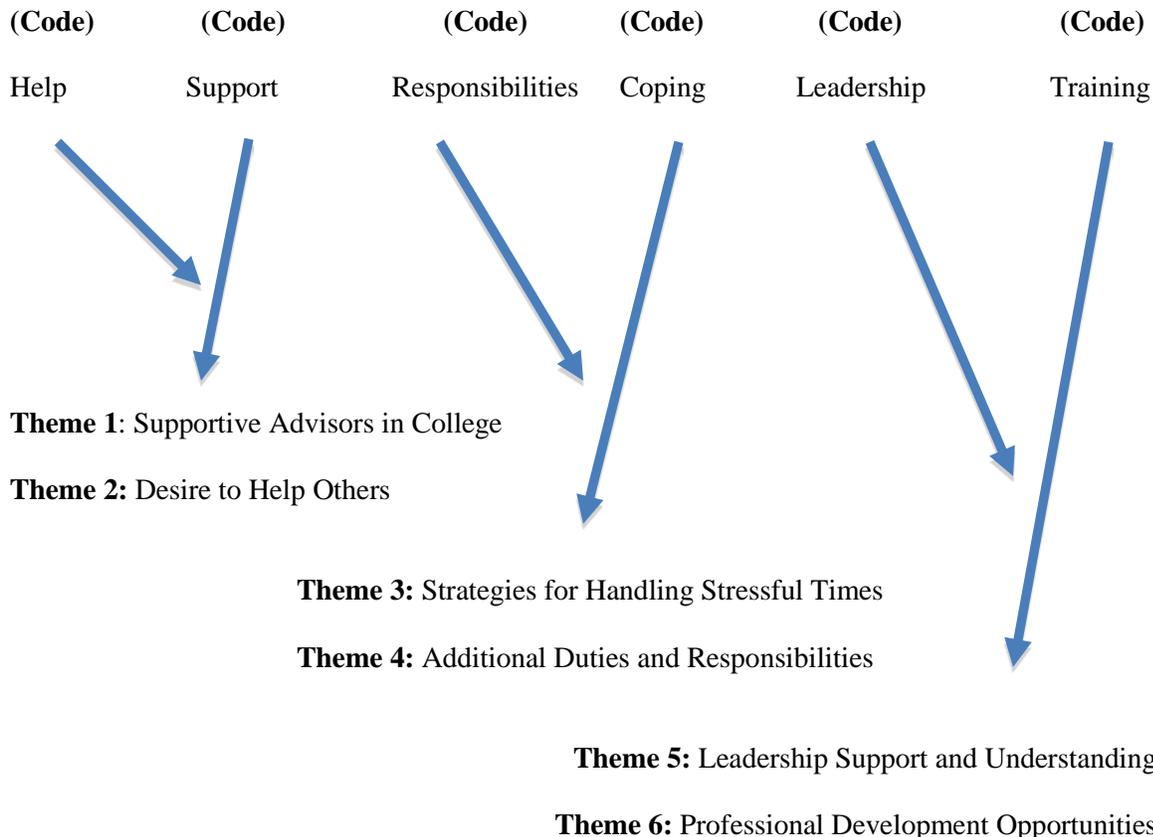


Table 4.1.
Additional Factors Identified in Positively or Negatively Impacting Advisor Engagement

Some Factors that Positively Impact Advisor Engagement	Some Factors that Negatively Impact Advisor Engagement
Leadership and Colleague Support	Excessive Extra Duties and Responsibilities
Adequate Job Resources and Facilities	Disengaged Students
Independence and Autonomy	Lack of Recognition and Compensation
Engaged Students	Insufficient Job Resources and Facilities
Training and Development Opportunities	Unsupportive Supervisors and Co-Workers
Recognition and Compensation Packages	* Online Campus: Pressure to be salesmen, rather than academic advisors. Performance
Extra Duties and Responsibilities	Reports Tied to Recruitment and Retention.

Theme 1: Positive Experiences with Advisors

Throughout each interview the first theme surfaced. All of the advisors who participated in this study said that during their college experience they had had a positive experience with at least one advisor who had made a difference in their lives. The degree of this difference depended on the participant and their relationship with their advisor. However, even though all of the advisors experienced at least one positive relationship with an advisor in college, some experienced what they felt were extremely poor advisors in college, whether at the undergraduate or graduate level. This impacted their experience in college and also influenced their own style of advising. Sophia connected exceptionally well with her undergraduate advisor with whom she spent much time and admired very much.

Sophia recalled her undergraduate advisor warmly:

I brought her small gifts like flowers or candy on occasion to show her my appreciation and we would often have conversations about life. As a current advisor, I now feel very guilty for having taken up so much of her time when she undoubtedly had so many other things to do. However, she was always so friendly and seemed to enjoy my visits, that I felt very welcome to stop by and see her any time. We talked at length about so many different things in life that I don't remember conversations about specific class/degree requirements. I loved to just go and talk with her.

Rogan described his experience with his advisor as being "excellent" and shared the following:

I had an excellent experience with my academic advisors when I attended XXXX for International Affairs. I remember meeting XXXX on my second day of orientation, and knew I had someone on my side. I would visit her each semester, even though we didn't have to at XXXX, to make sure I was doing what I needed to do and understood the degree.

Wilma, too, had an advisor with whom she was comfortable and made a positive difference in her college experience. Her advisor became a mentor to her and an individual whom she remembered fondly. Wilma described her experience in this way:

I was very fortunate to have a wonderful academic advisor as an undergraduate. He was my major professor as well as advisor and so I interacted with him in class as well as in advising. He was interested in making sure that I got an internship my junior year, which I did. He served as a reference for me when I applied for jobs as well as for graduate school. I considered him a mentor and would not have had such a great college experience had it not been for him.

Raquel, on the other hand, had a poor undergraduate advisor but she also had what she considered a good advisor in graduate school who helped her in different ways throughout this experience and whom she remembered as welcoming her thoughts and ideas. Raquel said:

He was very cognizant of the fact that I was working on the degree while working full time. He was also very open to my ideas...He helped me get the special permission required to take my elective through the School of Business.

Bryson had an advisor during college who also happened to provide him with private music lessons. They became close and he considered him a mentor. Bryson described his advisor as follows:

My advisor was my major instrument instructor. It was sort of the ideal advising relationship because I spent one to two hours per week with him in private lessons. Additionally, he conducted ensembles that I played in. So, he truly was a mentor to me.

Commonalities and Differences

As mentioned previously, all of the advisors said they had had a positive experience with at least one advisor during their college years; however, based on each individual experience the reason for these positive experiences varied among advisors. All talked about how these advisors helped them, supported them, and were there for them. Others also emphasized a close relationship to their assigned advisor and the significant impact this had on their lives. They felt they could trust them and laugh with them.

However, not all advisors had solely positive experiences during their college years. Some advisors had a combination of experiences with advisors that included positive, average, and/or negative experiences. One participant in particular had a very negative experience in graduate school with her faculty advisor. Although it was not her academic advisor, this had a

profound impact on her and her experience during this time. Sophia had an especially poor faculty advisor during college that impacted her entire experience during graduate school. She said of this experience:

For grad school – awful. I had one faculty advisor in the program and believe he is unethical and unprofessional. I went to speak with him about a summer internship, but he refused to sign the class registration form because he said he “wasn’t getting paid for it” since the faculty at the institution were about to strike. He gave no indication of a concern with the location, type of work, or hours to be completed, but refused solely because he “wasn’t getting paid... Later that summer I received a call in my home from my faculty advisor who immediately went into a diatribe of how I “went behind his back” and “stabbed him in the back” so I apologized profusely and tried to explain that I simply needed to complete my internship over the summer. He was unwilling to listen to my “excuses” and ended the conversation by saying that he “had nothing good to say” about me.

This particular faculty advisor not only refused to assist Sophia but also crossed a serious boundary by calling her at home and berating her. Raquel recalled an average experience during her undergraduate program. It wasn’t positive or negative, nor was it extraordinary or life-changing. Raquel described her experience in this way:

For my undergraduate program, I had an advisor from the Honors Program and, once I declared a major, a faculty advisor. I did meet with both advisors but, for the most part, it was just to make sure I was “on track” with regard to my graduation requirements. If memory serves me (it was a while ago...) I did most of my academic planning on my own.

Sophia's and Raquel's experiences show that even though they had positive experiences with advisors during their college careers, they were also exposed to the other end of the spectrum—either very negative or just mediocre. Despite these experiences, they still decided to become academic advisors and have proven to be high-level performers in their field. Furthermore, the consistent theme is that all of the advisors had at least one positive experience with an advisor during their college tenure, either as an undergraduate or graduate.

Theme 2: Desire to Help Others

The second theme that emerged was that each academic advisor had a desire to help others. Although some of the participants did not set out to have careers as Academic Advisors, they did want to help others through their careers. Wilma discussed how from an early age and because of the influence of her parents, she knew she would go into a helping profession. She said during the interview that despite the compensation being lower than for other professions, she still had a desire to enter the field of advising. She said:

I decided pretty early on when I was probably a teenage that I was interested in being in a helping profession...for the most part students are really appreciative of getting help from their advisors, getting guidance. I think it's a field where you get a lot of positive feedback, so that's really fantastic.

Rogan expressed his desire to solve problems and help others to do the same. He described his interest in the field of advising as follows: "I like solving puzzles, and academic advising provides the work environment where I can do that while helping people...." Bryson shared his passion about being an advisor in higher education. He believed strongly that higher education could change the course of someone's life and described how much joy he received from this by being a part of the process. Bryson shared these feelings as follows:

I got a lot out of my undergraduate experience and I wanted to find a way to help other people get a lot out of their undergraduate experience...I feel very passionate about higher education and how much it can affect and really help to change someone's life.

Raquel worked with veteran and military students. She shared how much she enjoyed working with this population and how much she liked helping her students to reach their goals. She expressed this by saying, "I enjoy it, I view each student individually and my job is to help them reach their goals and it's up to them to define their goals. Maybe they need a little guidance from me but I view it as my job to help them reach their goals." Sophia described her decision to enter the field of advising, basing it on her strong desire to help students succeed. She said, "In terms of becoming an advisor, I chose academic advising because it is a position that affords me direct contact with students."

Commonalities and Differences

Although all of the participants shared a drive to help others, where this drive is derived differs among advisors. Wilma, for instance, talked about the significance of her life history in her desire to help others. She described her experience this way:

I did some volunteer work as a teenager and I found I really enjoyed helping people and that was something that was encouraged by my parents, you know to reach out and do volunteer work and to try to help others and so I think that was very influential and eventually leading me to decide that that's what I wanted to do as a career.

Raquel, on the other hand, said that her drive came from the student population she advised. She shared what this has meant to her and her drive to help them succeed:

The veteran and military students with whom I work inspire me to continue my work as an advisor. They are motivated. They are humble. They don't complain when they get a

night class. They want to help themselves and, more important, many of them are getting the degree to help others. They served our country and protected our freedoms; guiding them through the college experience is the least I can do.

Bryson talked about his desire to help those students who came from low-income backgrounds and how this drove his desire to help. He said, “I felt very passionate about being able to help people from low-income areas, especially first generation college students.” Bryson ended up accepting a position near where he grew up because he knew a lot of students needed his help, especially as they enrolled in college. Like Raquel, the student population with whom Bryson worked had an impact on his level of engagement and drive.

Theme 3: Strategies for Handling Stressful Times

The third theme pointed to each advisor’s individual coping strategies for handling stress in their jobs. Some of those strategies included taking care of their health and well-being.

Planning and organization were discussed as coping tools but also as a preventative measure in mitigating anticipated stressful times based on advisors’ past experiences. Raquel said that when she experienced frustration at work, she handled it as follows: “When I’m feeling like I’m all over the place or I’m just getting frustrated, I’ll do some exercises, breathing, I’ll take a walk”.

Sophia, too, had her own strategies for coping with stress in the workplace. She placed sentimental mementoes from colleagues and students nearby to help her get through stressful times.

She described this as follows:

I keep all the little mementos and messages and cards that I receive from my students or colleagues and I’ll just, If I feel like I am upset or getting irritable, I’ll just pull out one of

those and use that to remind myself of why I'm here. I have classical music running in the background of my office and I try to keep my environment very relaxing.

Wilma said that while she is an easy-going person, one effective strategy is to be organized and pre-plan. Her experience, coupled with her calm-natured personality, helped her to cope well. She said, "I've done this long enough where I really understand kind of the routine you know. I anticipate certain periods are going to be crazy and so I kind of really let my planning kick in when I know what's going to happen." Rogan, like Raquel, found relief in exercise and taking deep breaths. He also indicated that he listened to music as a coping strategy during stressful times. He said, "I like going for a run, getting some exercise...especially if I'm really worrying or over-thinking something...take a few deep breaths, listen to something but also realize that I can't do everything on my own at the same time." Bryson said that his coping strategies included the following, "I exercise a lot, eat well; I hang out with colleagues, the people I work with are fantastic, if that weren't the case, I don't know if I would still be here."

Commonalities and Differences

All of the participants employed coping strategies to handle the day and stresses of their job. These included exercise and breathing exercises. Some participants indicated preferring pre-planning in advance of anticipated stressful times and relying on calming music played throughout the day to help control the mood of their work environment. There were many similarities overall among participants and fewer differences than for any other theme presented in this chapter.

Theme 4: Additional Duties and Responsibilities

The fourth theme was that each and every advisor had additional responsibilities beyond their advising roster and normal caseload. Most interesting was that these responsibilities varied greatly between academic institutions and departments. It was also clear that these responsibilities had different impacts on each individual advisor. Some advisors were impacted in a positive way, while others experienced a more negative impact on their engagement.

During the interviews, Wilma stated that her extra duties were actually improving her work engagement because they offered her an opportunity to develop as a professional and to learn more about technology. She shared the following about her experience:

I maintain two websites, our first-year college website, as well as a joint program we have called academic advising services...which has online advising as well as a center where we have students come in and so, I'm responsible for updating that website as well as creating new parts of the website...I really like having that other role that I do, it gives me a chance to kind of develop myself as an advisor, learn more about technology.

Raquel said that her extra duties actually detracted from her work engagement because they took her away from her primary student population, which she felt passionate about and for whom she had plenty of work. Bryson, like Wilma, also felt that his extra duties and responsibilities had a positive impact on maintaining his level of engagement as an advisor. Bryson said:

Wow, there's just so many different things I do. I've built a bridge program for underprepared students, rather than just accepting them to school we've put this program together where they can work with an outside agency to help determine if they're ready for college...I think the things outside, actually my student involvement and student

appointments are really want keep me engaged because it gives me more challenge, more opportunity for my own career.

Rogan said that his many responsibilities and extra duties led him to be more selective about taking on any additional or extra roles in the future so that he was not as pulled in several different directions. He shared the following:

Well, I have my toes in probably too many pots...we're constantly looking for ways to innovate and advisors are frequently tapped to be key players at the table. I'm the liaison to the department and to learning designers and to program planners and the marketing division. I've done everything from doing emergency evacuation planning for our own building to helping with research for you know administrators doing presentations, they need an little help with that, so I mean it varies you know where my strengths are. I'm certainly more selective now for a few reasons, I've dunked my toes in a lot of pots but also our team has expanded so there may be other people suited for particular skills.

Sophia, like Rogan, also said that the number of extra responsibilities impacts her ability to participate on committees and limits her participation in NACADA, which ultimately impacted her engagement and level of patience. Sophia said:

I probably have to spend anywhere from 5 to 10 hours, low end would probably be just a couple of hours, the high-end would be the 5 to 10 hours doing things related to admissions work related to graduate programs... I think my level of patience starts to dwindle as I have more of these tasks that aren't applicable to my specific job description added to me...I would still remain committed to NACADA and NACADA events but I may not be able to, like I wouldn't take on a new committee role or anything this coming

year because I know that we've lost a number of advisors in the college and I'm going to be asked to do more this coming year.

Commonalities and Differences

While all of the participants had extra duties and responsibilities of some kind, the types varied quite a bit and the impact on the individual differed significantly from one advisor to the next. Many factors seemed to impact this, with the first being the advisor themselves. Since each individual is different and manages stress and responsibilities in different ways, this would be an obvious factor in the response. Second, the types of responsibilities and duties assigned varied quite a bit—no two advisors had exactly the same additional responsibilities. Third, the number of responsibilities and duties in which each advisor engaged, in addition to the advisor's daily roster of students, impacted all of the advisors. Some had multiple extra responsibilities and duties for which they were so accountable that they rarely, if ever, had any down-time during their duty day, whereas others actually found relief in their additional duties because they did not have the same types and numbers as other participants. Lastly, the duration and frequency of the responsibilities and duties mattered. Some of the advisors had many extra responsibilities for which they were accountable all year long, while others had some extra responsibilities at only certain times of the year. For instance, Raquel talked about helping during the New Student Orientation program at her institution. This was the only additional responsibility about which she talked. She expressed that although this happened during the summer months, it took a toll on her engagement because it was a distraction from her regular caseload of students. She also talked about how different the population was that she was asked to advise during this time and how she preferred advising her regular population of students. Raquel said about this experience:

So in addition to advising the students on my caseload, I have to assist with the general new student orientation program, so this would be for the traditional first- year population and I don't advise this population but I'm asked to help out with doing presentations and helping making sure that they're registered properly. I would say that this does take a little bit away from the work that I do with my own caseload, it's a lot of juggling, especially during the summer months. My caseload does take many summer classes that are very engaged in taking the summer classes, so it is at times it is a little bit of a distraction, it's also a very different population from the veteran and military population to which I'm assigned to, so these are very different in terms of, the students are very different in terms of their engagement. I think that impacts my engagement...

Raquel had a sincere and deep passion for her job and for the population of students she advised. Any time taken away from fully supporting the veteran and military population not only affected her ability to give them 100% but also impacted her level of engagement, which she referenced during this interview.

On the other hand, Bryson talked about many of his extra responsibilities, specifically one about which he was very proud and described its positive impact on him due to the connection he felt by being involved. He said:

Wow, there's just so many different things I do. I've built a bridge program for underprepared students, rather than just accepting them to school we've put this program together where they can work with an outside agency to help determine if they're ready for college.... It makes me feel more connected to the campus because I think I have more of an influence on the things that can happen.

Bryson also talked about how at the end of a workday he was physically exhausted and emotionally drained because of gives everything he has each day to his students and to his work. As we talked about throughout this dissertation, researchers described work engagement as, “a positive work-related state of fulfillment that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). Engaged employees are energetic about their work, feel connected to their work, and are better able to deal with job demands (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007b). Bryson talked about feeling connected to his work but also feeling as though he is able to deal with the demands of his job, although he feels tired at the end of his day, he is fulfilled and happy about the job he is doing and the students he is serving in his role as an advisor.

Theme 5: Leadership Support and Understanding (*More to Academic Advising than Meets the Eye*)

The fifth theme that appeared throughout this study was leadership support and understanding (more to academic advising than meets the eye). Those who engage in advising do more than simply select classes for students. It is about connecting with students, building trusting relationships, and listening to them. It can be emotionally and physically exhausting. Regardless of how each advisor came upon advising, they were all passionate about their job and being the best advisor for their students. This passion, although motivating and highly desirable to many employers, can also take a lot out of advisors because they are so highly committed to their profession and to their students. Emotionally and physically, this can be draining, especially without the appropriate level of support and resources needed. Raquel felt that it was important for administrators to understand that there is more to advising than class selection and numbers on a spreadsheet. She expressed these thoughts:

I think it is extremely important for administrators to understand that advising is not simply “picking classes.” Yes, helping the student develop a working schedule is part of the job, and it is probably the part of the job that is most easily tracked in terms of number of student appointments, semester to semester retention, graduation rates, etc... Administrators can help advisors be successful by looking beyond the spreadsheets and the numerical tallies. I believe the best way to “measure” the effectiveness of advising is to seek input from the people with whom I am working.

During the interview with Wilma, she was very encouraged by her leadership and expressed how much she enjoyed her profession. She did offer some insight for administrators, however, and the amount of time spent by advisors on their work. Wilma thought it was important for administrators to understand the following:

I think sometimes administrators don't understand that beyond our regular advising meetings that advisors are often in contact with their students by email...which can be wonderful, but it's also additional work that I think a lot of times administrators may not understand it becoming part of our job. And so you have to kind of fact that time spent doing email or you know maybe some other form of technology that you're using but that advisees do to contact you in other ways sometimes and that needs to kind of be factored into the time you know you spent with each student.

Bryson, like Martha, also indicated that administrators underestimate and lack understanding in the amount of time and energy that goes into academic advising. He expressed that there is much more to his profession than picking classes. Bryson articulated this with the following words:

I think some administrators really underestimate the amount of energy that goes into this kind of job, like the emotional and intellectual energy, especially emotional energy,

because you leave this job and your drained, if you're doing it right. And you get people who think that the whole think about advising is making sure they don't take the wrong classes, which I mean that's a byproduct of advising and you know a high school kid who's responsible could make sure somebody takes the right classes 'cause it's just not that hard, it's the other stuff that goes into it that it's just very, very emotionally and intellectually, at times, draining and I don't think people understand that.

Rogan worked in higher education and predominantly worked with students in distance education. Many well-respected institutions have distance education programs of some type and employ academic advisors. Rogan worked at one of these highly respected institutions and felt it was critical for administrators to understand the following:

I'd say it's important for administrators to understand that academic advisers are not salespeople with a responsibility to keep students enrolled and, therefore, paying tuition. Academic advisers should not be solely held accountable for student retention, as quality instruction and student services also play a role.

The institution at which Rogan was employed was not a for-profit school; however, the types of pressure placed on him were reminiscent of those found at for-profit schools.

Commonalities and Differences

The advisors who participated in this study frequently stated that there was more to academic advising than most people realize. This was a common theme throughout the interviews with advisors. The advisors referenced the time and energy it took to adequately do their jobs and ensure they were providing the best service to their students. Some advisors talked about how drained they felt at the end of their day, both emotionally and physically. Some also noted concern about others' lack of familiarity with the role and responsibilities of advisers—

many believed that advising was simply about picking classes, which was just not the case according to the advisors interviewed for this study. One difference that stood out was between those advisors who worked with students completing their degrees through distance education at the university, compared to those who were advising traditional students. Although the advisor worked for an institution that was highly regarded for its traditional education as well as its distance education, the pressure put on academic advisors who worked in the distance education department to keep students enrolled reflected more of what is commonly associated with a for-profit college. This only surfaced within the constraints of an advisor who worked solely with distance education/non-traditional students. Higher education is competitive and institutions want to recruit and retain students. However, when advisors feel they have to be salespeople and that their job performance is impacted by the number of students they enroll, there seems to be a disconnect.

Theme 6: Training and Development Opportunities

All advisors who participated in this study indicating receiving the appropriate level of resources and supports at most times; however, they differed on how they obtained these resources and supports. Some advisors received everything they needed without asking and in plentiful amounts, while other advisors had to ask for everything they received. It must also be noted that with cutbacks in education and constant increases in tuition, advisors also are experiencing a greater decline in resources than in the past. Although resources are still adequate, some advisors expressed a concern about a decline in resources, which did impact their morale. Raquel felt that she received enough support to attend professional development activities and that these opportunities led to other ones, such as presenting at conferences and consulting with colleagues about working with her student population. She said:

I get adequate support in terms of going to conferences and professional development, not only going to professional workshops as a participant but also presenting, so I've had a number of opportunities to present at conferences and to just kind of talk about the work that I'm doing with advising the veteran and military students.

Rogan talked about how in his department they had "upped the game on training" in an attempt to improve learning for new advisors; however, due to the competitive nature of where he worked, they were being asked to "do more with less" and, therefore, when they did not receive the support/sources requested, this impacted morale. Of this, he said:

In terms of training, I think that our team has certainly upped the game on training in recent years, you know, a concerted training in terms of modules that we're using to train new advisors is certainly something that I didn't have when I started, this is what you do and I was advising students about 2 weeks later...I think it's a good learning environment just amongst ourselves, it's also though a competitive environment, so we need to keep a focus on efficiencies and costs and things like that which you know sometimes impact morale a little bit when we're told we can't do certain things because the money is not available.

Wilma said her leadership supported her in attending conferences and participating in professional development activities. She felt her leadership acted as advocates for their advisors. She said:

In terms of training, we're encouraged to go to conferences; we're encouraged to seek out professional opportunities that interest us. In terms of support, I think they're always kind of fighting to get more resources for us. It's been difficult with the budget constraints that we've had in the last few years but they're constantly trying to get support for us.

Bryson felt his leadership was very good because they let him do what needed to be done to get his job done. There was very little micromanaging and they supported his desire to attend conferences and pursue higher education for himself, as well as other professional development opportunities that came his way. Bryson said of his experience:

My leadership is really, really good and that is because they just let me do what I need to do. If I need to go to a conference, they're like, yeah cool, go to a conference... so, they're really supportive of my professional development in that way.

Commonalities and Differences

For the most part, advisors reported receiving adequate resources and training/professional development opportunities. However, some differences related to whether or not advisors had to ask for these resources and training/professional development opportunities. All participants reported being able to attend conferences and had a good relationship with NACADA. There was a contrast in experiences, however—some advisors faced advocating for themselves in order to receive what they needed, either due to budget cuts or just a difference in the level of support. Other advisors reported that their leadership advocated for them. In these cases the advisors said that their leadership were once advisors and understood clearly their needs and challenges as advisors. Advisors who reported having to advocate for themselves had leadership with less direct experience in advising or were working within the constraints of online advising. The end result was that all of the advisors received the resources they needed. They also were able to attend conferences and take advantage of training/professional development opportunities as needed.

Table 4.2 presents in summary format the research questions from this study as well as the corresponding interview questions. Specific interview questions are found in Appendix D.

Table 4.2.
Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Question
What defines the professional academic advisers' work engagement experience?	Interview 1. Q. 1. Interview 2. Q. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6. Interview 3. Q. 1, 2, 3, 4.
What factors contribute to the manifestation of highly engaged academic advisers?	Interview 1. Q. 2. Interview 2. Q. 2, 3, 5, 6. Interview 3. Q. 2, 3, 4, 5.
What self-reported issues negatively impact work engagement of academic advisers?	Interview 1. Q. 2. Interview 2. Q. 4, 5. Interview 3. Q. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.
What, if any, coping strategies do academic advisers employ to address those issues?	Interview 1. Q. 2. Interview 2. Q. 4, 5. Interview 3. Q. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, a participant profile was provided and the primary themes that emerged during the course of this study were discussed. The six themes were: (1) Positive Experience with Advisors; (2) Desire to Help Others; (3) Strategies for Handling Stressful Times; (4) Additional Duties and Responsibilities; (5) Leadership Support and Understanding; and (6) Training and Development Opportunities. Finally, commonalities and differences for each theme among participants were discussed. In the next chapter, the research investigation is summarized, conclusions are discussed, and recommendations are offered based on information stemming from this study.

Chapter 5

Summary, Discussion, Recommendations and Implications for Practice, Conclusions and Future Research

In an effort to provide perspective and shed light on the factors that influence the work engagement of professional academic advisors, this study examined those factors by talking with academic advisors currently in the field. The main drivers of work engagement involve job resources, “such as social support from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, skill variety, autonomy, and learning opportunities....hence, resources are not only necessary to deal with (high) job demands, but they also are important in their own right” (Bakker, 2009, p. 9). Participants in this study provided invaluable insight into their experiences and the factors that impact their work engagement. They also offered perspective on coping strategies that they found to be meaningful in managing their daily caseload and stressful situations as they arise.

Summary

This study offered important insights into factors that impact academic advisors’ level of engagement. Findings are also consistent with past research by other researchers on the topic of work engagement among employees in various fields. The research questions for this study were: (1) What defines the professional academic advisors’ work engagement experience; (2) What factors contribute to the manifestation of highly engaged academic advisors; (3) What self-reported issues negatively impact work engagement of academic advisors; and (4) What, if any, coping strategies do academic advisors employ to address those issues? Participants were provided a definition of work engagement in both the target letter and again at the beginning of the interview. All advisors had their individual interpretations of engagement and how they

operationalized it in their everyday lives.

The focus of the first research question was what defines the professional academic advisers' work engagement experience. The interviews indicated that this is very individualized and at the same time factors emerge that are core elements in what defines this experience. These included the amount and complexity of the extra duties assigned to advisors. The impact on work engagement was either positive or negative—this solely depended on the individual advisor's perspective. Next, leadership played a critical role in the experience advisors had. For our advisors this proved to be true. Not only did the understanding and policies in place by leadership but also the access to training and professional development opportunities impacted advisors' engagement. Finally, all advisors expressed a desire to help students succeed, as well as concern for their well-being. The advisors who participated in this study were clearly passionate about what they were doing and their desire to help their students was evident. This impacted their engagement level and motivated them to continue in their career field, even during those stressful times or busier moments in their day.

The second question posed for this study sought information on factors that contribute to the manifestation of highly engaged academic advisers. The one factor that stood out among all factors was the innate desire to help their students succeed in their college career but see them succeed in life. This factor, however, is something that is internal and individualized, so what was discovered during this study was that all of the participants seemed to have this common factor present. They were also nationally recognized by NACADA for their job performance. Further, they had a desire to succeed as individuals and share that passion. Additionally, the advisors felt their leadership supported them; they were provided opportunities for professional development and training. It was also true that they felt a strong connection to NACADA and

enjoyed attending conferences, as well as participating in activities sponsored by NACADA.

The third research question sought information on the self-reported issues that negatively impact the work engagement of academic advisers. The issues reported by the participants mainly had to do with the number of additional duties and responsibilities assigned to them. Some of the advisers had larger rosters of students and many extra duties. Some advisers felt they did not have enough time to get everything done within their work-day and reported that they often do work on the weekends or stay late just to keep up. This had a negative impact because although they were passionate about their work and fully engaged, they, too, experienced burnout at times. The number of extra duties also took away from their advising of students. Advisers also reported that although leadership was supportive, they may not realize how time-consuming advising can be, especially with technology being what it is. Students contact advisers via email, instant messages, virtual advising, and so on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Students expect answers instantaneously, even on weekends and evenings. Therefore, some advisers are expected to see a full load of students during their duty day, complete their paperwork and additional duties, participate in new student orientation programs, be engaged in professional development activities, attend meetings, answer student emails/requests, and engage in a number of other items. Unfortunately, the amount of time in a normal duty day just is not enough. Advisers also reported that compensation for their services is often low and not commensurate with their education and amount of responsibility. Although the advisers who participated in this study said they were not deterred from the field because of this, they do recognize it as a factor that impacts their engagement, especially when they are investing the number of extra hours and energy required of them to complete their duties at a high level.

The fourth and final question for this study involved identifying any coping strategies

employed by academic advisers to address those issues? The advisers who participated in this study had several coping strategies. These included paying attention to the health and well-being of the individual. Advisers talked about how exercise helps them or how they will stop if they become frustrated and take walk around campus to get fresh air to clear their mind and re-energize. Some of the advisers also employed breathing exercises, which helped them regroup and get their stress level under control. Also, some advisers elected to pre-plan and organize. This helped them to manage the level of stress and prevented additional stress. Other advisers talked about how they used calm music and dim lighting in their office to project a level of calmness not only for themselves but also their students. Lastly, advisers kept mementoes and cards they've received from students, and looked to these sentimental items to help them cope with the stress of their jobs and inspired them to keep going.

Discussion

The central aim of this study was to investigate the factors that influence work engagement for academic advisers. This study's results are valuable for researchers as a springboard for future studies. Although this was a small sample, it is a valuable sample and one that can be extended in size in the future and used as a starting point by other investigators. Several key findings materialized. First, the work engagement of academic advisers is impacted by numerous factors, both positive and negative. This finding is not altogether surprising; a significant amount of prior research has discovered similar findings. In a qualitative study of career satisfaction among faculty in the medical field in Brazil, Da Silva Campos (2009) found that responsibility and autonomy in decision-making, the opportunity to learn new skills through professional growth and development, recognition/appreciation, and reinforcement were among the key factors impacting engagement among medical faculty. This study also found that some of

the same key factors impacting engagement among medical faculty in Brazil are also impacting academic advisors in the United States. Utilizing the jobs demands-resource model, job resources such as professional opportunities for learning, job control, and support from colleagues and leadership have been found to positively impact work engagement among employees, leading in turn to better performance (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). The aforementioned study further supported the findings of this research.

This study also indicated that when academic advisors experience a strong support system at work (colleagues and leaders), the positive emotions arising from such experiences provided them with more energy and motivation in their role. Engaged employees transmit their enthusiasm to others; causing colleagues to become more engaged as well as perform at a higher level (Bakker & Xanthopoulou, 2009). They also reported a greater level of trust and emotional connection to their workplace because they feel valued and appreciated. Advisors who have opportunities to continue their professional development and training in order to further develop their skills experience improved engagement. Their experience is more positive—this is something advisors who participated in this study appreciated because it helped them stay connected to other colleagues in their field, as well as improve their own skills as advisors.

The results also revealed that this population of employees believed that employing coping strategies was essential to dealing with the daily stresses of their job. Although strategies varied among participants, all indicated having at least one coping strategy that helped them manage their workloads and stress. Van Beek, Taris, Schaufeli, and Brenninkjeijer (2014) indicated that, "...engaged employees are less likely to have a prevention focus than others. Thus, they are less likely to use avoidance strategies and may avoid to a lesser degree negative outcomes from happening than others in a similar situation might do" (p. 55). In other words,

advisors do not engage in avoidance strategies but rather coping strategies. In part, they experienced a higher level of engagement because they developed coping strategies that allowed them to manage their daily stressors and were able to provide their advisees with the best services possible and had a high degree of positive experiences.

Furthermore, participants reported a strong desire to help others, although not all advisors had intended to go into the current field or even initially knew that advising was a career, they shared a desire to help. This was consistent throughout the study—this population wanted to be in a profession in which they could help others in some way. According to Ouweneel, Le Blanc, and Schaufeli (2014):

One can direct gratitude toward life experiences or toward people. Expressing gratitude may lead to other kinds of positive emotions such as enthusiasm and inspiration because it promotes the savoring of positive experiences... These momentary positive feelings may result in longer-term states of well-being such as engagement (p. 41)

This works both ways between the advisor and the advisee. When advisees expressed direct gratitude, either in words or actions, towards their advisor for their help, the advisor experienced positive emotions. When the advisor experienced positive emotions, they spread to other advisees, colleagues, and even family. This is a factor in advisor engagement and motivation to continue on in their career. This also helped advisors get through stressful moments of their jobs and helped them to cope.

The following table summarizes my recommendations related to each research question.

Following the table, I discuss these recommendations.

Table 5.1

Identified Themes with Corresponding Research and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Emerged Themes	Related Recommendations
What defines the professional academic advisers' work engagement experience?	Theme 1 Theme 2 Theme 3 Theme 4 Theme 5 Theme 6	1. Launch employee engagement assessments 2. Re-evaluate and revise additional duty policies 3. Re-assess training and development opportunities 4. Reinforce leadership support and teamwork culture
What factors contribute to the manifestation of highly engaged academic advisers?	Theme 1 Theme 2 Theme 3 Theme 4 Theme 5 Theme 6	1. Launch employee engagement assessments 2. Re-evaluate and revise additional duty policies 3. Re-assess training and development opportunities 4. Reinforce leadership support and teamwork culture
What are the self-reported issues negatively impacting work engagement of academic advisers?	Theme 4 Theme 5	3. Re-assess training and development opportunities 4. Reinforce leadership support and teamwork culture
What, if any, coping strategies do academic advisers employ to address those issues?	Theme 3	4. Reinforce leadership support and teamwork culture

Recommendations and Implications for Practice

Based on the themes that emerged from this study, leaders in the field should examine the following areas:

1. Launch employee engagement assessments
2. Re-evaluate and revise additional duty policies
3. Re-assess training and development opportunities
4. Reinforce leadership support and teamwork culture

It is important for administrators to understand their advisors' current level of engagement and their needs within the department. Employee engagement assessments should be used to determine the current level of engagement and to evaluate the current needs of the advisors employed. Based on this study's results, it's also recommended that leaders re-evaluate and revise additional duty policies, as needed. Advisors' level of engagement was impacted greatly based on the additional duties, some positive but overall negative. This is why it's critical to re-evaluate the current policies governing additional duties in departments and to determine whether advisors have too much to do, as well as the impact of work load on their engagement. This study showed a need for a re-assessment of training and development opportunities within the academic advising department. Since this factor influences engagement, it would be in the interest of those who have a stake in this to ensure that adequate opportunities are provided. Moreover, managers and supervisors should take steps to ensure that their advisors feel supported in their roles. Leadership should be visible, available, and communicative with their employees in order to build trust and open the lines of communication. After all, leaders set the tone and have a major role in the culture of their departments. A teamwork culture is essential to advisors because it contributes to a positive work environment as well as to their level of engagement.

According to Rothwell (2014), by spending time and energy on employee engagement, organizations are better able to manage human resources and integrate HR strategies. Rothwell (2014) said the following about engaged employees—they:

- Are less likely to resign
- Are more likely to speak positively of the organization to customers and possible job applicants

- Are likely to attract talented people
- Perform better
- Are more highly motivated
- Lead to higher organizational profitability
- Lead to lower incidence of health and safety problems
- Speak more positively about the organization to customers and prospective customers
- Are more aligned with organizational values and ethics
- Are more trusting of organizational management Feel that they can play to their personal strengths more often (p. 17)

There are clear benefits to investing in improving engagement within the advising field and at universities in general. “Leadership commitment from all levels determines the practices and priorities that set the tone for an organization’s climate and creates a culture of engagement” (Zaballero & Myers, 2014, p. 147). Leaders can make a meaningful difference in the lives of their employees and those they serve just by understanding the importance of engagement and then taking action with the knowledge they have about this.

Finally, although advisors reported having the resources they needed for the most part, they did share that budget constraints or lack of initiative by their managers led to issues with obtaining needed resources. This should not be the case—the research clearly shows that resources impact engagement and therefore, managers should demonstrate a serious commitment to ensuring employees have the resources they need, with as limited issues as possible. Bakker and Xanthopoulou (2013) advised, “Evidence for the positive impact of job resources on work

engagement is accumulating, and previous research has shown that a range of job resources can facilitate work engagement” (p. 3).

Implications for Practice

This study’s findings suggest that high employee engagement within the academic advising field is critical not only to the health of the university and its advisors but to the student population being served. Leadership must not only understand the value of high engagement and its importance in the workplace but also of becoming educated on those factors that specifically impact their advisors. Employee engagement is not something that can be resolved with a survey and a couple of department initiatives; this is something that should be a daily priority for university leadership. Employee engagement should be a priority for academic advising department leadership and for advisors now and into the future.

This study underscored the importance of employee engagement to the field of academic advising; it should be viewed as a priority to those in leadership positions within the university setting, specifically departments governing advising. For university leadership, this research study underscored the importance of building positive work environments that are supportive of academic advisors, as well as supportive in professional development opportunities, training, job resources, and advisor autonomy. Any factors that decrease advisor engagement should be examined and when possible, eliminated completely. By creating and sustaining a work culture that fosters teamwork, respect, and constructive communications, universities will be able to attract high-caliber talent. Organizations will also have a better chance of retaining this talent and providing their students the best advisors available.

Moreover, university leadership needs to not only pay attention to but also invest in the engagement of the advising workforce. They need to understand the connection between the level of work engagement and the impact on their organizational successes—in this case, their university.

Conclusions and Future Research

This study identified the multiple factors that impact an academic advisor's level of engagement. It is true that employee engagement is and will continue to be a critical component of successful organizations regardless of the job sector. In academic advising, the factors that influenced the engagement level were several and varied depending on the advisor, as well as the department within the institution. Leaders must continue to be cognizant and proactive in understanding what these factors are and how their employees are impacted by them. In the field of advising we now know better what these factors are, both positive and negative. We also need a greater understanding of the coping strategies employed by these advisors that may also help others in the field. With this knowledge, leaders and advisors alike can move forward with a clearer understanding and better insight than they had before.

Additional areas that would benefit from future research would be compensation and advancement opportunities for academic advisors. Compensation was not a focal point or driver in this study; however, some advisors stated that compensation and opportunity for advancement were low within their field. Therefore, moving ahead with research focused on this area and opportunities for improving this aspect would be of interest to some advisors. Although none of the advisors were employed by “for-profit” universities in this study, that population is worth researching in a future study. Perhaps a study comparing and contrasting the engagement levels of “not-for-profit” vs. “for-profit” academic advisors would be a worthwhile study. Further

examination of the work engagement of academic advisors would be both worthwhile and meaningful.

Finally, there is a need for future research in the field of advisor leadership to determine not only their perceptions of the role of advisors but also their own engagement. Findings from this study will provide knowledge and understanding needed by executive leadership about the experiences of the advisor.

Chapter Summary

This study brought to light many factors that impact employee engagement. It also identified many areas in which leadership should re-engage and improve upon, too. With this information, which will have been provided directly from the advisors working within the field, other advisors and leaders alike can move forward equipped with tools and knowledge that will further improve the field of advising, both for advisors and those they serve.

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https://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~yanz/Content_analysis.pdf

Appendix A:

Target Population Letter (Full-Scale Study)

Dear (Participant Name)

I am writing to request your assistance in a research study that I am conducting at Penn State University Workforce Education Department to identify the factors that influences the work engagement of academic advisors. Your participation in this study will provide a valuable contribution to the profession. My name is Jennifer Myers, and I am a PhD candidate in Workforce Education and Development the Pennsylvania State University. I am currently gathering research for my dissertation and would find your input of great value.

My research focus is about the factors that influence Academic Advisor's level of Work Engagement. I believe that the job of an Academic Advisor is critical to the academic journey of university students and that is why I am conducting this research. You may ask yourself what is the definition of work engagement? Researchers described this as "a positive work-related state of fulfillment that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). Engaged employees are energetic about their work, feel connected to their work, and are better able to deal with job demands (Schaufeli & Sal nova, 2007b). Understanding the level of engagement in your day-to-day work will be helpful to education institutions, administrators, students, and advisors as we address our organizational, educational and policy practices to meet the needs of advisors in their day to day work environment.

A Narrative Inquiry Method of Qualitative Research will be used for this study. Specifically, you will participate in three rounds of interviews. After each interview, all responses will be documented and analyzed. The three-round process will be as follows:

Interview 1: The first interview will be conducted by electronic email: ***Focused Life History***

Interview 2: The second interview will be conducted in-person, if possible, by electronic email, or by phone: ***The Details of the Experience***

Interview 3: The third and final interview will be conducted in-person, by electronic email, or by phone: ***Reflection on the Meaning***

Because only a small number of experts have been selected to participate, your involvement is vital. Your involvement through the entire 3-interview process is critical to the validity of the results and your experience and expertise is crucial to the success of our study.

All information you provide will be held in the strictest of confidence. You will not be identified by your real name in the final dissertation study. The researcher will assign an alternative name to you that will be used for future identification purposes and to track your submission of responses only. The key list of identifying numbers and matched names will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to meeting with you and interviewing you over the next several weeks/months. Please feel free to contact me any time at the contact information below.

Sincerely,

Jennifer L Myers, PhD Candidate Workforce Education and Development The Pennsylvania State University 301 Keller Building University Park, Pa 16801 Jlm856@psu.edu

Appendix B

Target Population Letter (Pilot Study)

Dear (Participant Name)

I am writing to request your assistance in a research study that I am conducting at Penn State University Workforce Education Department to identify the factors that influence the work engagement of academic advisors. Your participation in this study will provide a valuable contribution to the profession. My name is Jennifer Myers, and I am a PhD candidate in Workforce Education and Development the Pennsylvania State University. I am currently gathering research for my dissertation and would find your input of great value.

My research focus is about the factors that influence Academic Advisor's level of Work Engagement. I believe that the job of an Academic Advisor is critical to the academic journey of university students and that is why I am conducting this research. You may ask yourself what is the definition of work engagement? Researchers described this as "a positive work-related state of fulfillment that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 295). Engaged employees are energetic about their work, feel connected to their work, and are better able to deal with job demands (Schaufeli & Sal nova, 2007b). Understanding the level of engagement in your day-to-day work will be helpful to education institutions, administrators, students, and advisors as we address our organizational, educational and policy practices to meet the needs of advisors in their day to day work environment.

A Narrative Inquiry Method of Qualitative Research will be used for this study. Specifically, you will participate in three rounds of interviews. After each interview, all responses will be documented and analyzed. The three-round process will be as follows:

Interview 1: The first interview will be conducted by electronic email: ***Focused Life History***

Interview 2: The second interview will be conducted in-person, if possible, by electronic email, or by phone: ***The Details of the Experience***

Interview 3: The third and final interview will be conducted in-person, by electronic email, or by phone: ***Reflection on the Meaning***

You have been selected to be a member of the pilot study group. As a result, you will be asked for your feedback and input on the clarity of the questions. I will use the input from the pilot study to enhance the interview questions for the full-scale study. Because only a small number of experts have been selected to participate, your involvement is vital. Your involvement through the entire 3-interview process is critical to the validity of the results and your experience and expertise is crucial to the success of our study.

All information you provide will be held in the strictest of confidence. You will not be identified by your real name in the final dissertation study. The researcher will assign an alternative name

to you that will be used for future identification purposes and to track your submission of responses only. The key list of identifying numbers and matched names will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to meeting with you and interviewing you over the next several weeks/months. Please feel free to contact me any time at the contact information below.

Sincerely,

Jennifer L Myers, PhD Candidate Workforce Education and Development The Pennsylvania State University 301 Keller Building University Park, Pa 16801 Jlm856@psu.edu

Appendix C:
Participant Informed Consent Form

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Narrative Inquiry into the Factors that Affect Professional Academic Advisors Work Engagement.

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Myers, PhD Candidate
Workforce Education & Development
Penn State University
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 777-7360; jlm856@psu.edu

Advisors: Judith Kolb, PhD
Associate Professor of Education
Workforce Education & Development
Penn State University
(814) 865-1876; jak18@psu.edu

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to evaluate the factors that affect the work engagement of academic advisors.
2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will be a critical part of this study by participating in a 3-part interview.
3. **Duration:** It will take about 15 to 45 minutes to complete each interview of the study.
4. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. Your confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties. Participants' real names will not be identified in the study appendix or final dissertation. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared because your name is in no way linked to your responses.
5. **Right to Ask Questions:** Please contact the Principal investigator listed above or either of the advisors listed above with questions or concerns about this study.
6. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research study is completely voluntary.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Please, sign below identifying that you have read this information and wish to participate in this study.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Appendix D:

Semi-Structured Interview Instrument

Semi-Structured Interview Instrument

The following 3-part interview will consist of multiple questions per segment. Therefore, each participant will have 3 separate interviews with 3 different sets of questions per interview.

Interview 1-Questions (Focused Life History) *Electronic Interview*

1. What were your experiences with academic advisors when you attended college?
2. What experiences or people have inspired your life to cause you to select your current profession?

Interview 2-Questions (The Details of the Experience) *In-Person Interview, if possible.*

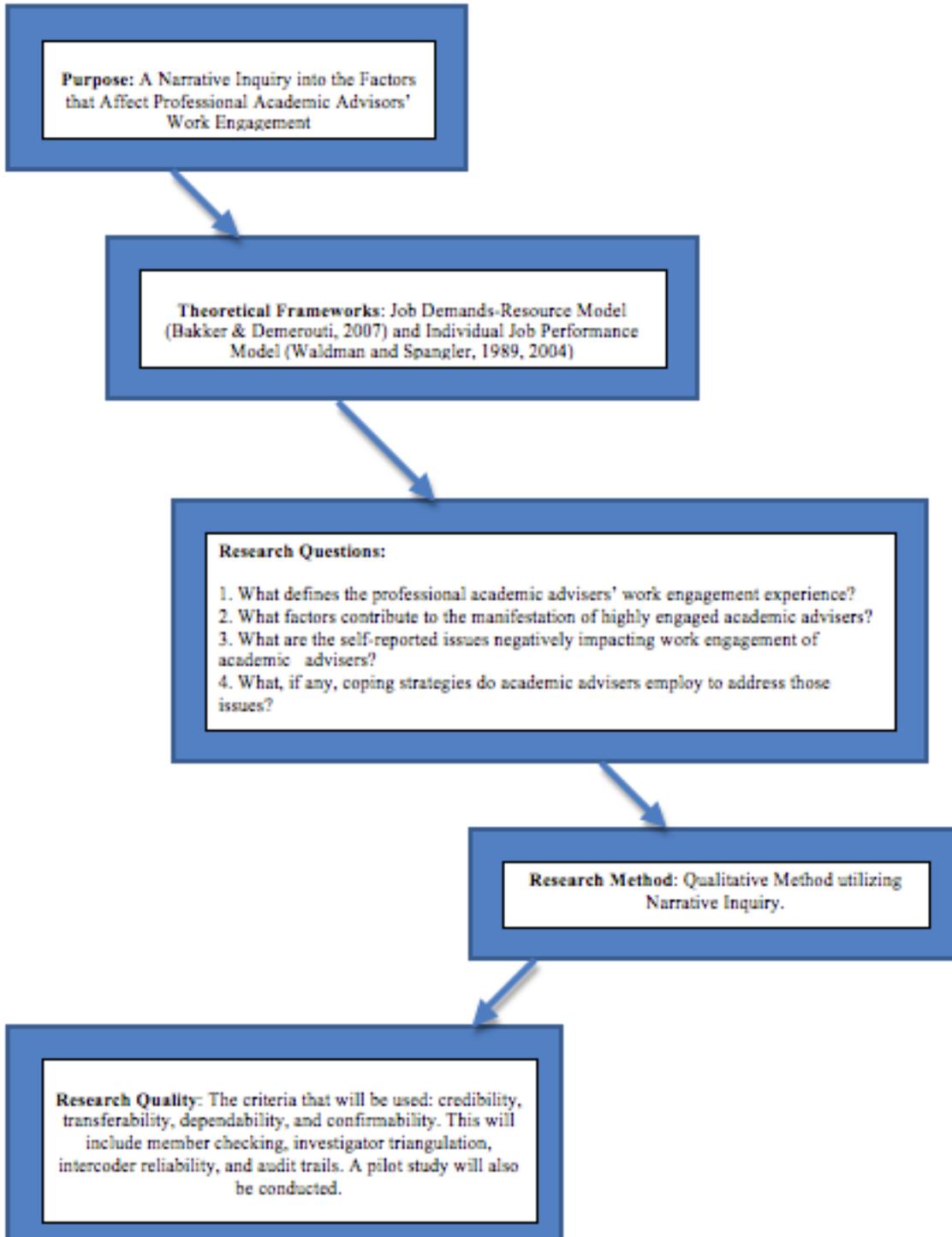
1. What factors (both personally and professionally) influence your engagement level at work?
2. How long have you been in your profession? Do you notice a difference in your level of engagement based on the number of years you've been an advisor? If so, what do you feel are the causes?
3. What extra duties/responsibilities outside of your regular job of advising those students assigned to your roster are you required to do? How do you feel these impact your level of engagement?
4. Do you have personal coping strategies to handle the day-to-day routine and special challenges of your job? If so, what are they?
5. Do you feel that your leadership understands these stresses? If yes or no, please explain.
6. Do you feel you receive adequate support, training, and resources from your leadership to most effectively carry out your duties as an advisor and provide the best service to your advisees? Why or Why not?

Interview 3- Questions (Reflection on the Meaning) *Electronic, phone, or in-person interview.*

1. How important do you believe your life history has been in your decision to become an academic advisor?
2. What person(s) in your life had the most influence on your decision to become an academic advisor, if any?

3. Of the professional training and education you have received, which has been the most meaningful in helping to improve your performance as an advisor?
4. Have there been any students that you have advised who during your tenure as an academic advisor that have left an indelible mark and inspired you to continue as an advisor? If so, why?
5. What do you think is important for administrators to understand about the role of academic advisors that you feel they may not understand and in what ways can they help you to be successful in your job?
6. What do you think is the most important thing for new academic advisors to understand before entering the field?

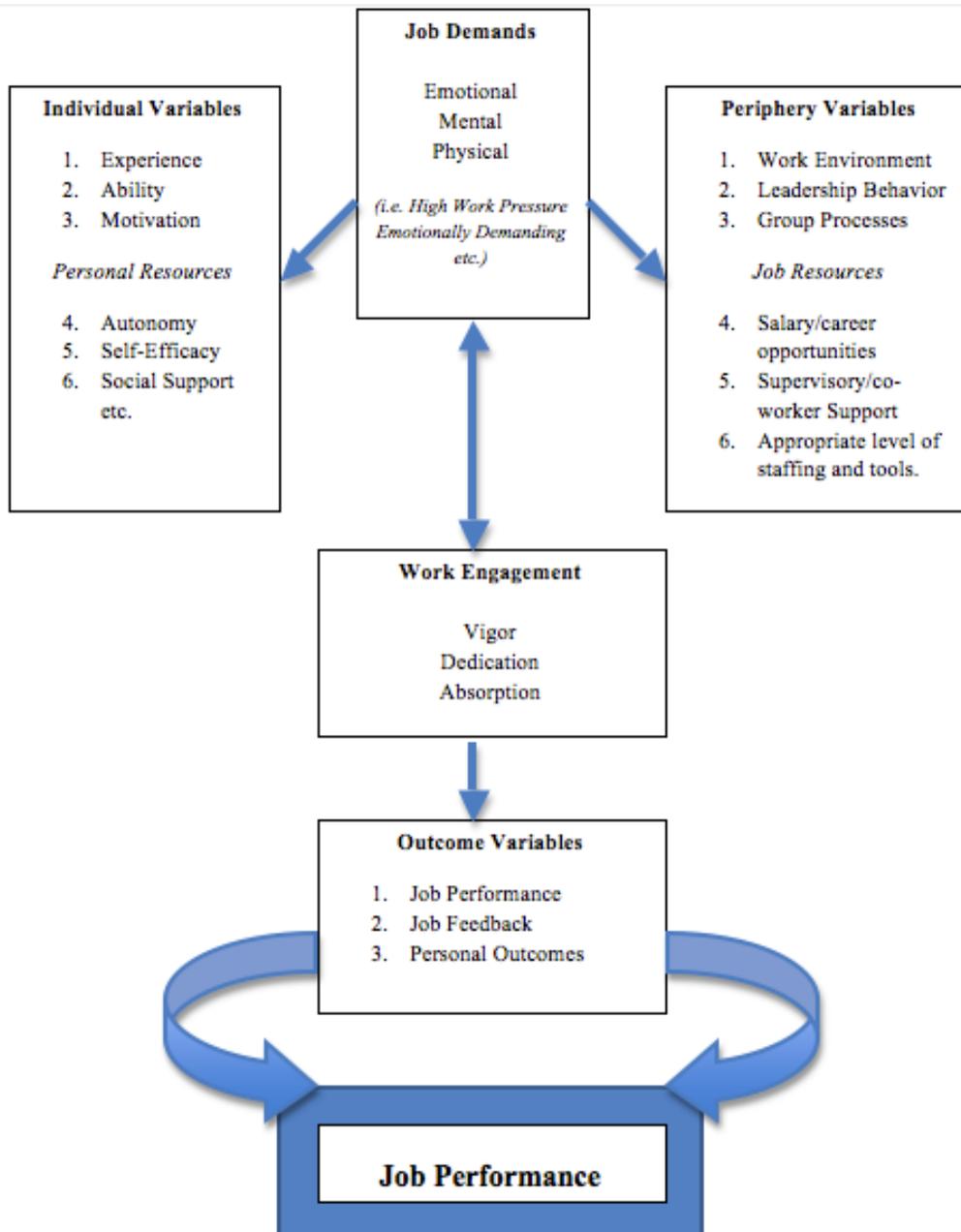
Appendix E: Research Design Overview



Appendix F:

Theoretical Framework

Sources: Adapted Tool based on Bakker & Demerouti Job-Demands Resources Model (2007) and the Determinates of Individual Job Performance Model by Waldmon and Spangler (1989, 2004).



Appendix G:
Coding Example

Example 1:

Yes, I do, I think they're always looking for ways to kind of help us.	Leadership
In terms of training, we're encouraged to go to conferences; we're	Training
encouraged to seek out professional opportunities that interest us.	Training
In terms of support, I think they're always kind of fighting to get more	Leadership/support
resources for us. It's been difficult with the budget constraints that we've	Support
had in the last few years but they're constantly trying to get support for us.	Leadership/support
So, yes, I think they do a really good job in trying to understand what we	Support
need and to kind of lobby for our needs.	Support

*Leadership supported and encouraged participant to attend professional development Opportunities. Leadership did a good job of understanding advisor's needs and getting enough resources for participant.

Examples 2:

I decided pretty early on when I was probably a teenager that I was	<i>Life History</i>
interested in being in a helping profession and I did some volunteer	Help
work and I found I really enjoyed helping people and that was	Help
something that was encouraged by my parents you know to reach out	Support
and do volunteer work and to try to help others.	Help

*Participant's life history impacted decision to enter academic advising career. Participant had a strong desire to help others and was encouraged by parents at a young age to get involved in volunteer work.

Examples 2:

I have classical music running in the background of my office and I try to	Coping
keep my environment very relaxing . I basically do this most for my students	Coping
because if I ever had to deliver any news that may be negative they would cope	Coping
better . But I found actually it helped for me as well. I always have those 10 dollar	Coping
CD's from Target or Bed Bath and Beyond for relaxation .	Coping

*Participant employed coping strategies to create relaxing work environment. This helped the participant, as well as the students to cope better.

Appendix H

Author Permission – Dr. David Waldman and Dr. William Spangler

PENNSYLVANIA State University Collaboration Suite

Search JENNIFER L MYERS

Mail Address Book Calendar Tasks Briefcase Preferences RE: The Determini

Close Reply Reply to All Forward Delete Spam Actions View

The Determinates of Individual Job Performance Model 3 messages

JENNIFER L MYERS 6:10 PM

Thank you Sir. I appreciate your response. I wanted to actually show it in my dissertation as a figure and I just wanted to be sure it was okay. Yes, ...

From: David Waldman
To: JENNIFER L MYERS (spangler@binghamton.edu)
Cc: Judith Kolb

Jennifer, thanks for referring to our model. But for the record, you really don't need our permission to use it, as long as you provide proper citation.

David Waldman

From: JENNIFER L MYERS 5:57 PM
To: waldman@asu.edu (spangler@binghamton.edu)
Cc: Judith Kolb

Hi Dr. Waldman and Dr. Spangler,

My name is Jennifer Myers and I am a PhD candidate at Penn State University. The reason I am writing you today is to request your permission to use The Determinates of Individual Job Performance Model from Waldman, D., & Spangler, W.(1989) Putting together the pieces: A closer look at the determinants of job performance, Human Performance, 2(1), 31. I would like to reference this model as one of the frameworks for my dissertation study and show the figure you both developed.

I want to thank you in advance for your consideration of my request and also for all of your professional contributions to this topic.

Sincerely,
 Jennifer

Jennifer L Myers
 PhD Candidate
 Workforce Education and Development
 Emphasis HRD & OD
 jlm856@psu.edu

From: William D Spangler 12:13 PM
To: JENNIFER L MYERS
Cc: David Waldman (Judith Kolb)

Hi Jennifer,

No problem. As Dave mentioned, you don't need our permission. Good luck on your dissertation.

On Tue, Jan 6, 2015 at 6:10 PM, JENNIFER L MYERS <jlm856@psu.edu> wrote:
 Thank you Sir. I appreciate your response. I wanted to actually show it in my dissertation as a figure and I just wanted to be sure it was okay. Yes, I will definitely make the appropriate reference. Again thank you so much, it's an excellent model.

Jennifer

----- Original Message -----
From: "David Waldman" <waldman@asu.edu>
To: "JENNIFER L MYERS" <jlm856@psu.edu>, spangler@binghamton.edu
Cc: "Judith Kolb" <jak18@psu.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, January 6, 2015 6:04:51 PM
Subject: RE: The Determinates of Individual Job Performance Model

Vita

Jennifer L Myers

Terminal Education

Ph.D. Workforce Education and Development May 2015
Specialization: Human Resource Development and Organization Development GPA 3.93
The Pennsylvania State University

Current Experience

Human Resources Specialist (HR Development) Aug. 2014-present
Workforce Development and Career Services
The Department of Veteran Affairs

Selected Publications

- Zaballero, A. G., & Myers, J. L. (2014). Engaging the best people. In W. Rothwell, A. G. Zaballero, & J. G. Park (Eds.), *Optimizing talent in the federal workforce*. New York: Management Concepts Press.
- Baumgardner, C. Z., & Myers, J. L. (2014). Creating an engaged culture. In W. J. Rothwell (Ed.), *Creating engaged employees: It's worth the investment*. Alexandria, VA: ASTD.
- Wolfehope, K., & Myers, J. (2014). Leadership and the effects on employee engagement, *Journal of Knowledge and Human Resource Management*, 6(13).
- Alzahmi, R. A., & Myers, J. L. (2013). Identifying performance gaps through needs assessment. In W. J. Rothwell (Ed.), *Performance consulting: Applying performance improvement in human resource development* (pp. 342–344). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Imroz, S. M., & Myers, J. L. (2013). Application of SWOT Analysis. In W. J. Rothwell (Ed.), *Performance consulting: Applying performance improvement in human resource development* (pp. 305–307). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Myers, J. L., Alzahmi, R. A., & Binsiddiq, Y.A. (2013). Challenges and issues facing the healthcare industry workforce. *International Journal of Social Health Information Management*, 6(5).
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