Affective Organizational Commitment: A Comparative View of the Experience of 5-7 Year Managerial Employees Who Participated in an Employee Identity Network

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who have been there from the beginning with prayers and encouragement, but most of all unwavering love and support. In particular, I dedicate this to my parents and grandparents who instilled in me the desire to educate myself and to strive to be better when they knew from experience the difficulty one faces in spite of individual success.

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I must specifically thank my participants and co-researchers in this study who so generously shared themselves with me. It is their honest and open remembrances of their experiences that allowed this study.

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My Cohort 15 colleagues followed our motto of “Each One Bring One.” Even as they finished their own journeys, they stayed connected to me and encouraged me to plow on. They were there for advice or a simple word of encouragement. The faculty and staff of the Executive Leadership Program always provided the assistance needed before I knew it was needed and it is all these people that are, and will always remain close and dear friends.

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Abstract of Dissertation

Affective Organizational Commitment: A Comparative View of the Experience of 5-7 Year Managerial Employees Who Participated in an Employee Identity Network

There is a perceived impending shortage of skilled talent for the corporate world, as well as the US federal and state governments (Herman, 2004). This issue is much fodder for discussion of how to retain employees, how to develop loyalty and the birth of catch phrases such as "global employer of choice." The concept of engaging employees for greater firm performance; and for finding ways to continuously engage employees with the idea of becoming an employer of choice may be one of those areas that scholars, consultants and practitioners have the right idea, but translation to an executable plan is difficult.

This phenomenological study contributes to the literature on organizational commitment, and employee identity networks through the lived experiences of the participants. This study focuses on why people stay through the conceptual framework of Allen and Meyers' (1991) work organizational commitment and their affective commitment prong. Participants were interviewed twice and the interview data was analyzed utilizing Moustaka's (1998) empirical psychological phenomenological method (EPPM).

Given the turnover of employees with short tenure, one question is whether organizations are providing the right elements to foster organizational commitment, job embeddedness or engagement. More specifically, what keeps employees at companies? This study takes a comparative look at the lived experience of a diverse sample of employees who have stayed with the

company between 5-7 years. The study looks at the perspectives of African Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, Hispanic Americans, who participated in an employee identity network and the perspectives of White American males who did not participate in an employee identity network.

Findings revealed five themes that contributed to the development of affective commitment. The study has concluded that actions taken by both the company and the participant around a critical event were paramount in why people stayed and that employee identity networks provide much of the antecedents to affective commitment and ultimately to the decision to stay despite a difficult critical career event.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

There is a perceived impending shortage of skilled talent for the corporate world, as well as the US federal and state governments (Herman, 2004). One of its causes is the retirement of baby boomers and the lower birth rates that followed this generation, other than the Millennials (born between 1980 and 2000). In one research study, (Deloitte, 2005, p.4), it was pointed out that in just a few years," two emerging trends will force organizations to start paying unprecedented attention to their critical talent. The first is the retirement of the Baby Boomers, the first crop of which retired in 2008. Meanwhile, many schools are having trouble meeting the demand for qualified candidates "

In Baumruk (2004), an engagement study for Hewitt and Associates, it was also said that there will be both a US and global shortfall of talented employees which will be a cog in the wheel of competitiveness. This issue is much fodder for discussion of how to retain employees, how to develop loyalty and the birth of catch phrases such as "global employer of choice." The concept of engaging employees for greater firm performance; and for finding ways to continuously engage employees with the idea of becoming an employer of choice may be one of those areas that scholars, consultants and practitioners have the right idea, but translation to an executable plan is difficult. There is much literature on HRM practices and their effects on firm performance (Delaney & Huselid, 1996: Huselid, 1995; Huselid, Jackson & Schuler, 1977). The constructs of organizational commitment or the similar concepts of

employee engagement and job embeddedness, social network theory and employee identity network groups are also subjects of scholarly study (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Becker, 1960; Baumruk, 2004; Friedman, 1990; Ibarra, 1992). However, some consulting firms, and practitioners have begun to use their research and that of the academic arena to push the envelope beyond the current literature to redefine the playing field in which they participate (Corporate Executive Board, 2004; Deloitte, 2005; Towers-Perrin, 2003, PwC, 2013). These studies have suggested that employees are not committed, embedded or engaged. The research indicates that corporations are only getting part of the hearts and minds of their employees, but in order for corporations to compete in the global marketplace, corporations must raise what the studies call the engagement index (Towers-Perrin, 2003, PWC, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

The issue of a talent shortfall (not enough skilled people for the available jobs), is compounded by a reduction of employee loyalty and engagement, which has been exacerbated by decades of downsizing, globalization, and corporate consolidations (Rudis, 2003). The Towers-Perrin Talent Report (2003) defines engagement as the, "employees' willingness and ability to contribute to company success...the extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work" (p.1). Baumruk (2004) similarly defines employee engagement as the state of the emotional and intellectual commitment. These studies show a clear link between increased engagement, improved retention and financial performance.

A General Electric study (Global Engagement Study, 2004) has found startling information that is likely in part caused by these issues. This multinational company has found that over one half of its professional and managerial employees had less than five years of service. Its employee attitude survey had found that these employees felt less connection to the values of the company, and additionally, a review of the turnover data found that 80% of the unwanted attrition (although total turnover is only 7% per annum) occurred before five years of service. In a recent study (PwC, 2013) had found that while Millennials (those born from the late 1980's to early 2000's) and non-Millennials have a lot of similarities, the Millennials did not expect to work for PWC for 9 years.

While the data showing less employees in the pool indicates a real challenge for finding talent to fill positions, the US workforce data also indicates that while White employment remains the majority, the growth of the labor force will be fueled by the more explosive growth of the Hispanic workforce, followed by the Black and Asian workforce (Toossi, 2002). This US labor demographic combined with increased globalization of economic markets points to the need of employers to reach out for talent from wherever it can be found. During this time, many companies have focused on increasing employee and supplier diversity and have increased their diverse hiring, particularly in the entry levels. However, since that time, the issue has been promotions into the management ranks (Council, 2001). A Black Enterprise article highlighted the 75 most influential African Americans in the business world. Nevertheless, the Black Enterprise

editorial has stated that, "only 1 % of the senior corporate management jobs in America were held by African-Americans" (Graves, 2005, p. 18). Jeff Immelt, President and CEO of GE in speaking of the GE African American Forum (AAF) said, "If we find that we're still losing people in that pathway between 2 to 10 years and the AAF is not stopping that, then we're not doing our jobs. You're not doing your job. That's the part of the deal you gotta (sic) own" (Radford, 2004. p. 16). Some consequences of a developing shortage of talented employees could include lower productivity and increased training and development costs (Herman, 2004). This is of heightened concern as this phenomenon relates to people of color (Zatzick, Elvira, & Cohen, 2003) and can adversely affect conditions for retention and ultimately lead to less diversity in an organization. The idea of losing talent or having difficulty in attracting talent has severe outcomes for corporate costs and ultimately the competitiveness of a company. The research literature, the consultative studies and the corporate experience have indicated that solving this impending shortage of talent will be critical to the competitiveness of any corporation. Moving forward, it is clear much of the needed talent will come from diversity in the workforce, and in attempting to retain their current talent, and to attract new talent, corporations are striving to be employers of choice.

Thus the major issue that is both a practitioner problem, and of scholarly interest is in order to become an employer of choice and retain all types of employees, and in particular diverse employees, it is important to understand not only intent to stay, but also what encourages all people to stay. In recent years

corporations have supported, and sponsored employee identity groups to provide networking, training and other support to their employees of color, women, and in some cases employees with alternative sexual orientation. Ibarra (1995) study of the social networks of managers of color has indicated a higher degree of homophily and intimacy and the employee identity network is likely a contributor to that effect (Friedman, 1999).

Given the turnover of employees with short tenure, one question is whether organizations are providing the right elements to foster organizational commitment, job embeddedness or engagement. More specifically, what keeps employees at companies? This study takes a comparative look at the lived experience of a diverse sample of employees who have stayed with the company between 5-7 years. The study looks at the perspectives of African Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, Hispanic Americans, who participated in an employee identity network and the perspectives of White American males who did not participate in an employee identity network.

Purpose and Research Questions

As a result of this impending shortfall of talented employees for the number of corporate opportunities available in corporations (Barney, 2002; Sigler, 1999), and the increased turnover in organizations, particularly as the economy grows, an effort should be made to understand a certain phenomenon. That is, the phenomenon of talented employees who remain in their corporation beyond this initial tenure period of five years. Specifically, this study focuses on strategies for reducing the loss of talented professional and managerial

employees by large companies during the early stages of their time with the corporation. There is a gap in understanding this phenomenon, which leads to this study's key research questions.

Research Questions

The research question is: What is the meaning of the lived experience of professional/managerial employees who stay employed in this corporation for a period between 5-7 years?

There are other questions of interest to further explore this phenomenon to better understand the professional/managerial employee's reflective perceptions, interpretations and day-to-day remembrances about their lived work experiences.

1. What elements of affective commitment came out of the experience of these professional/managerial employees?
2. What role does the employee identity network have in the affective commitment of these participants to the organization?
3. What difference is there in the organizational networks of diverse employees as compared to White American Male employees?
4. What choices in the participants experience led to this tenure?

The next section describes why these research questions are worth investigating.

Statement of Potential Significance

In Tesch (1987), it is suggested that phenomenological research is taken on by the researcher because the phenomenon is of particular importance to the

researcher. Tesch has said, "It is something at the center of their personal or professional interests, and therefore they know a lot about it at a human level" (p. 236). Clearly this is true for this researcher with a long career as an HR professional, as an African American, as a long service employee (who did leave after 15 years but returned to his corporation), and as an early contributor to the development of an employee identity network group at the study site. But more importantly, this study adds to the prior research on organizational commitment or employee engagement as it contributes to retaining professionals by determining if there is a difference in professionals of color or white male professionals. This study looks at professionals who are participants in employee identity network groups and are of color or women, and white male professionals who are not members of an employee identity network.

Most of the literature lies in the area of organizational commitment and engagement. Social network theory is well developed, but there is only a small body of literature on the employee identity network groups. Other than Friedman, Kane, and Cornfield (1998), there is even less literature looking at these constructs together and Friedman et al. and Ibarra (1995) have looked at these constructs together in the context of African Americans. Another factor in this study is the extension of the Friedman and Holtom (2002) research on the role of employee identity network groups on minority intent to stay. This study focuses on select participants and took an in-depth look at why they stayed for a period of at least five years. The study explores the lived work experience of those participants in the network groups. In addition, we looked at participants

who are White American males and who do not participate in an employee identity network.

Furthermore, the past research is often focused on intent to stay and is based on survey data rather than an understanding of the phenomenon. In addition from a practitioner's perspectives, this study helps organizations understand how professional/managerial employees make decisions on when and what to do about their career choices. Also, this study provides guidance to other employees about the sustainability of a career in one organization beyond the early years of working within that organization. Lastly, this study intends to expand upon the theory of other researchers by sharing a new conceptual framework, which is the topic of the next section.

Conceptual Framework

The managerial/professional employees who have tenure beyond five years have developed some form of stickiness or attachment to their particular job or to the organization. The literature explains this with various terms and constructs such as organizational commitment, job embeddedness and employee engagement.

Theoretical Lens

The theoretical lens, through which I looked at the phenomenon of professional/managerial tenure, is Meyer and Allen's (1991) theory of organizational commitment. Their theory has described organizational commitment as a three-pronged construct with a dimension of affective or emotional, psychological connection to the organization, continuance

commitment which is as Becker (1960) had described a series of side bets about what the costs of leaving versus staying are, and normative commitment described as the moral obligation to stay with an organization.

This study is limited to the examination of employee experience to Meyer and Allen's (1991) affective prong of organizational commitment, and focuses on employees with between five and seven years of tenure with the subject organization. This prong is described by Meyer and Allen as a psychological or emotional attachment to the organization as distinguished from the attachment derived from having to give up something like a financial benefit or a sacrifice of moral obligation or values. The study looked in-depth at 16 employees with 5-7 years of service because the issue is: getting individuals to stay beyond the very early years where the organization has invested in training and development, but is not yet the level of tenure where the employee's cost for leaving is substantial. The particular concern is how to retain the diverse employees through this critical time period.

In looking through this lens other constructs related to organizational commitment may apply: employee engagement has been described by the Corporate Executive Board (2004) as the degree to which employees "commit to something or someone in their organization" (p.4) which derives from organizational commitment, also job embeddedness described by Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez (2001) as the "key mediating construct between specific on-the-job and off-the-job factors and employee retention" (p.

1111) appears as another derivative of organizational commitment that could apply.

In the case of diverse employees, these elements or contributions to organizational commitment are delivered or enhanced by an organization's willing to support a separate formal group that is recognized as corporate entity referred to as "employee identity network groups." These employee identity network groups might be considered another factor in how affective organizational commitment is developed and the antecedents to organizational commitment are delivered, thus resulting in longer tenure. Friedman (1993) indicates these organizations create an environment where Ibarra's (1992) concepts of social networks can be cultivated. Further, this study expands upon the thoughts of Friedman and Holtom (2002) focusing on an in-depth look at why people of color who participated in employee network groups stayed for at least five years.

The organizational commitment literature suggests there are certain things that come before employees are engaged or committed to an organization. Such antecedents include work experiences, onboarding processes and management. Conversely, there are certain outcomes that arise from developing organizational commitment. The outcomes most often mentioned and studied are greater individual performance, better financial results for the corporation and an attitude by the employee indicating intent to stay with the company. The literature suggests that staying or tenure is a function of factors which have different impacts over the service life of an

employee. In the following conceptual framework outlined in Figure 1, the structural factors mentioned in the Friedman (1993) and Ibarra (1992) studies, as well as Mitchell et al. (2001) are moderated by elements of support, opportunities, trust and belonging. As these factors influence and impact the employee and a matching of goals is effectuated, greater commitment and engagement occurs leading to longevity in the organization. In this study, the essence of the phenomenon of staying with a multinational corporation for at least five years by considering Meyer and Aliens' (1992) affective commitment prong of organizational commitment. Mitchell et al.'s (2001) construct of job embeddedness and idea of employee engagement as described by the Corporate Executive Board (2004). Factors contributing to this commitment, embeddedness, and engagement in this study are Ibarra's social network theory, and Friedman's views on employee identity networks. Figure 1.1 below is pictorial description of how these concepts apply to the essence of the lived experience of professionals and managers.

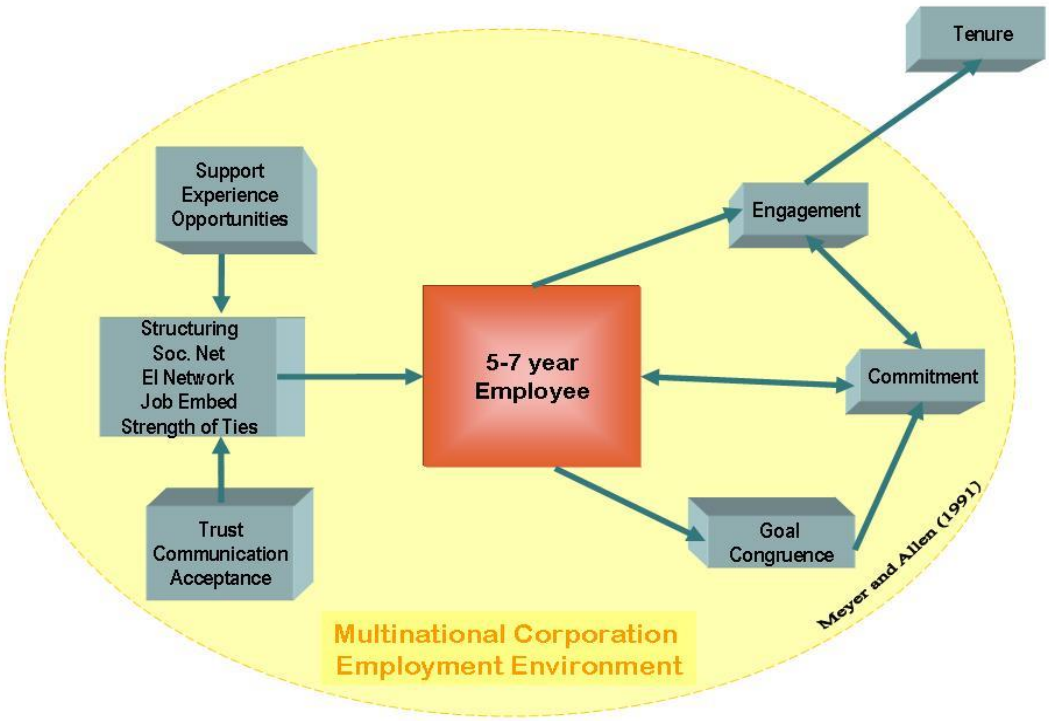

Figure 1.1. Organizational Commitment As viewed through the structural factors that contribute to organizational commitment (Friedman, 1993; Ibarra, 1992; Mitchell et al., 2001).

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment refers to the attachment, emotionally and functionally, to one's place of work. Historically, in social science, organizational commitment is a construct that was studied for quite some time, and can be found in the literature extensively over the past 50 years. In an early study, Becker (1960), had hypothesized that an individual's commitment stems from side bets the individual makes. These are links or investments in something valuable to the individual that would be lost if they left the organization. The study of organizational commitment usually focuses on attitudinal commitment or behavioral commitment (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982; Scholl, 1981). In

Mowday et al. (1982), we have received an explanation of the distinction between the two approaches. They have described attitudinal commitment as "a mind set in which individuals consider the extent to which their own values and goals are congruent with those of the organization" and behavioral commitment as, "the process by which individuals become locked into a certain organization and how they deal with this problem"(p. 26). Studies of attitudinal commitment have examined attributes such an attitude and the resultant outcomes from the attitude (Buchanan, 1974; Steers, 1977). Behavioral commitment studies, on the other hand, attempt to determine situations that lead an individual to commit to an organization (Kiesler, 1971; Salancik, 1977a). Meyer and Allen (1997) have shown the construct of organizational commitment as, a psychological state, but acknowledge that this state can develop retrospectively...as proposed in the behavioral approach, as well as prospectively...as advocated in the attitudinal approach"(p. 10). The definitions of organizational commitment come from these approaches and are varied.

The theoretical lens through which the construct of organizational commitment is viewed is Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-dimensional theory of organizational commitment: affective, continuance and normative, but is delimited to the affective dimension. The continuance and normative dimension are based on the individual's perception of loss or cost to leave the organization and on duty or obligation to stay with the organization. Within this concept of affective commitment, there are other issues of how the antecedents are delivered, as well as what those antecedents are? Such items as social support,

strong or weak network ties, work experiences, job orientation and opportunities for learning and development are possible antecedents to affective commitment can be relevant here. Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) have indicated that there can be moderating variables to organizational commitment such as "non-work commitment, company policies on promotions and rewards, job demands, and visibility of position...task interdependence, distribution of commitment in group, contacts with non-group members, group-organization goal congruence, and organization transfer and promotion policies" (p.138).

Engagement

Engagement is a relatively new buzzword in the lexicon of consultants and management practitioners. Its genesis appears to be in both the scholarly literature of organizational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1996) and in the strategy literature (Porter, 1985), and also in the body of research focused on the relationship of corporate financial performance with HR practices (Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler 1997).

This construct of engagement seems most linked to the affective commitment prong of the Allen and Meyer (1996) organizational commitment theory. In fact, the Corporate Executive Board's (2004) engagement study lists Allen and Meyer (1996) and Hertzburg (2003) among those that lead to their definition as, " the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, how hard employees work, and how long they stay as a result of that commitment" (p. 4). Their study considers commitment as a level of

attachment or agreement to come to work at an organization and be involved in the organization at a high performance capacity.

Job Embeddedness

Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez (2001) have introduced a new construct call job embeddedness as an alternative to the attachment research that focuses on the links between attitude, alternatives, search and ultimately turnover. They have suggested their construct developed from examining non-work issues, work inducements separate from attraction to job or organization, and precipitating life events caused turnover. Their model has links, fit and sacrifice as dimensions. This researcher sees these dimensions as close to the Meyer and Allen prongs of organizational commitment in that they describe costs or sacrifice, emotional or psychological attachment and fit, and links or attachment to people and activities. This construct might be broader in considering greater aspects of an employee's life. They describe the dimensions as “(1) the extent to which people have links to other people or activities, (2) the extent to which their jobs and communities are similar to or fit with the other aspects in their life spaces, and (3) the ease with which links can be broken - what they would give up if they left" (p. 1104).

Employee Identity Network Groups

Employee identity network groups are groups of employees within an organization who share a common identity, defined by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or shared extra-organizational values or interests. These employees come together in formal groups that are a part of the overall

corporate organization with the intent to share information, capture career opportunities and solve problems affecting the members of the group (Briscoe & Safford, 2010; Friedman, 1996; Functional Diversity Primer, 2003).

These employee identity network groups do certain things to orient, assimilate, train and develop members of the collateral organizations so that hopefully there is a faster, better, identification with, and attachment to the organization. In doing these things, the groups focus on self-help and organizational change. Friedman and Carter's (1993) data have found four significantly positive factors of employee identity network groups: social support, support for younger members, informal advice and the ability to express their concerns. Friedman and Craig (2004) say this only happens after the minority employee assesses the cost-benefit for participation, and if the employee identifies with the particular employee identity network group. In addition, Friedman and Holtom (2002) have supported the premise that participation in the employee identity network group has a positive effect on the employee's intent to stay. This study extends that concept to the idea that it has an impact on people actually staying, and their engagement in the company.

Social Networks

Friedman (1999) has suggested that employee identity network groups provide a homophilious social network for the employee identity group that allows the individual members to find social support in a potentially adverse environment while obtaining information, and voice for their concerns. Network homophily derives from the belief that there is better communication, acceptance

and trust among those who are like us (Ibarra, 1992). It also stems from a tendency of people to dislike those that are dissimilar (Rokeach, 1960; Wilder & Allen, 1974). However, according to Ibarra (1993) homophily is a problem with numerical minorities. Ibarra's studies of social networks, particularly as it relates to women and minorities present interesting information that is crucial importance in this research. For example, Ibarra (1993) in studying social networks and power distinguishes between, "the instrumental network links that arise in the course of work-role performance and expressive network relations that primarily provide friendship and social support" (p. 282). Ibarra has suggested that employee identity networks provide the expressive network for numerical minorities (which the researcher for this study is defining as a statistically smaller group of employees who in terms of race or ethnicity are not in the majority within their corporate organization), but that instrumental networks must be included to provide the connectivity in the work role, and implies that it is lacking in employee identity networks. Friedman (1999) has argued that employee identity networks also provide access to instrumental networks by broadening the participant's total network stating that "simply meeting more people provides additional weak ties which increases the size of that employee's network" (p. 152). This researcher's work experience, and Friedman's studies indicate that these organizations are different in that they are recognized and supported by the corporation, and that both corporate leadership and numerical majority employees attend many employee identity network activities.

In summary, the data from this qualitative study led the researcher. Yet, the researcher is influenced by the elements of the conceptual frame presented here, and that this exploration and description of the phenomenon of the lived experiences of these professional/managerial employees provides insight into the potential for lengthening of service for all employees, but in particular, diverse employees. Such insight contributes to the scholarly, consultative and practitioner research by providing guidance on the specific elements of these constructs that add to tenure, as opposed to attracting employees and discretionary work effort.

Summary of the Methodology

This is a phenomenological study based on the lived experiences of professional/ managerial in a large multinational corporation. The analysis includes 16 participants' four members from each of the following different affinity groups: African American, Hispanic American, Asian Pacific American and White American Males (who were not members of an affinity group). Each member has 5-7 years' experience in the same large multinational corporation. According to US Department of Labor, a large firm employs more than 1000 employees (2005). The analysis of these experiences uses the empirical psychological phenomenological method (EPPM) from the Duquesne studies as a phenomenological project Van Kaam (in Moustakas, 1994).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

The researcher is aware of the following possible limitations to this study:

1. This study is of course limited by the fact that it is a study in a specific company, and studied the work experience of particular groups of employees
2. The researcher was an African American HR executive in the company in which this study occurs and as a result:
    - Knows many of the potential participants.
    - Was an original organizer of an employee identity network in this Company.
    - Had a role in the hierarchy of the organization that might impact participation in the study.
    - Departed the Company and returned to its employ.
3. This is a study of employee experiences, and therefore is a look back that may mean poor memories, distortions in reflection, and change in the maturity and perceptions of the participants that may influence the reflective view of their actions and feelings.
4. The number of participants is limited to four from each employee identity network group (African American, Hispanic American, Asian-Pacific American) and four White American Males who were not participants, and is not an attempt at reaching saturation of the phenomenon.

Delimitations of this Study

Some delimiters in this study are:

1. The focus on only one prong of the three prongs of organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997).
2. The focus on only one outcome of the constructs of commitment, job embeddedness and engagement, which is professional and managerial tenure.

One concern with focusing on only one dimension of commitment is that Meyer and Allen (1997) consider,

> It is more appropriate to consider affective, continuance, and normative commitment to be components, rather than types, of commitment because an employee's relationship with an organization might reflect varying degrees of all three...consequently, researchers stand to gain a clearer understanding of an employee's relationship with an organization by considering the strength of all three forms of commitment together than by trying to classify it as being of a particular type. (p. 13)

However, the normative dimension is excluded because as Meyer and Allen (1997) have said, "normative commitment refers to an employee's feelings of obligation to remain with the organization. Thus, employees with strong

normative commitment will remain with an organization by virtue of their belief that it is the ‘right and moral thing’ to do" (p. 60), but this research focuses on how the emotional attachment to the organization is built.

One rationale for delimiting continuance commitment is that while employees are likely to stay with the organization, continuance commitment is negatively related to positive performance, effectiveness and other important organizational results (Angle & Lawson, 1994).

Definition of Terms

African American: This term is generally used as a description of a person with Black African heritage who is a United States citizen. In this study the term is broader, and relies on self-selection and may include Blacks who are citizens of other countries, provided they are permanent workers in the US.

Hispanic American: The term generally refers to persons who trace their origin or descent to Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and other Spanish cultures and are American citizens. In certain parts of the United States, Latino is the more common name. In this study the term is broader and relies on self-selection and may include Hispanics or Latinos who are citizens of other countries, provided they are permanent workers in the US.

Asian Pacific American: This generally refers to a US citizen having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. In this study the term relies on self-selection and may include those with such origin who are citizens of other countries, provided they are permanent workers in the US.

White American Male: A male US citizen having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. In this study, we include those self-selecting who may be citizens of other countries, provided they are permanent workers in the US (Office of Management and Budget, 1997).

Professional/Managerial: In this study the term is used to describe those employees who are in salaried FLSA exempt roles that are on a managerial track either as an individual contributor or as a manager of people.

Below Executive: In this study the reference is to the three salary bands for professional/managerial employees at the subject company that are below the top three bands of the company which are considered executive level

Employee Identity Network: In this study the term is interchangeable with Affinity Group and is an organization within a corporation formed on the basis of an identifiable trait such as race, sex, disability or other similar characteristic that is most often sanctioned by the larger organization (Friedman, Kane, & Cornfield, 1998).

Embeddedness: Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez (2001, p.1104) describe the dimensions as "(1) the extent to which people have links to other people or activities, (2) the extent to which their jobs and communities are similar to or fit with the other aspects in their life spaces, and (3) the ease with which links can be broken - what they would give up if they left."

Organizational Commitment: According to Allen and Meyer (1991) organizational commitment is a three-pronged construct with a dimension of affective or emotional, psychological connection to the organization, continuance

commitment which is about the costs of leaving versus staying, and normative commitment or the moral obligation to stay with an organization.

Six Sigma: Quinn (2003) defines it as management framework utilizing statistical tools to focus on process improvement.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This review of the literature has examined the construct of organizational commitment and its derivatives of engagement and job embeddedness. Then, an exploration of the employee identity network group literature and social theory was made to provide a context for which African American professional/managerial employees might obtain antecedents to affective organizational commitment and potentially lead to tenure. The focus of this literature review has explored how the research into these areas contributes to our knowledge on why people stay with large organizations beyond a relatively short period of tenure. Just before publication, the researcher undertook another look at the literature and updated this section with additional studies as needed.

Description and Critique of Scholarly Literature

This description will first explain the similarities in the research of the other constructs of organizational commitment, engagement and job embeddedness then look at employee identity network groups and social networks. We start with why people stay in their organization.

Why People Stay

The body of research literature on why people stay with their organization can be classified as focused on satisfiers and dissatisfiers, and sought to go more deeply and understand organizational commitment, engagement or embeddedness. Dissatisfiers have been defined by Harkin (1990) as, "personally significant reasons for an employee to leave the company" (p. 75).

Harkin has found that employees do not stay if more than one dissatisfier is present. He has lumped the dissatisfiers into five categories: (a) the confidence factor (loss of hope with organization's direction); (b) emotional issues (lack of recognition or development opportunities); (c) trust (too many perceived broken promises); (d) fit with the organization (match of values and principles); and (e) listening or voice (employee views heard).

Holtom et al. (2005) has assigned shock as the immediate antecedent to leaving. A shock was described in (Holtom et al. (2006) as a jarring event which could be positive, negative or neutral.

Organizational Commitment

There has been much research in the area of organizational commitment and the antecedents leading to it (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Also, additional research has indicated that organizational commitment has had positive outcomes in performance, effectiveness, and employees' intent to stay with the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Tett & Meyer, 1993).

As indicated earlier, the study of organizational commitment historically has come from a school of attitudinal commitment or from a school of behavioral commitment (Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982: Scholl, 1981). In Mowday et al. (1982), we have received an explanation of the distinction between the two approaches. They have described attitudinal commitment as "a mind set in which individuals consider the extent to which their own values and goals are congruent with those of the organization" and have defined behavioral

commitment as, "the process by which individuals become locked into a certain organization and how they deal with this problem" (p. 26). Studies of attitudinal commitment have examined attributes that lead to such an attitude and the resultant outcomes from the attitude (Buchanan, 1974; Steers, 1977). Behavioral commitment studies, on the other hand, attempt to determine situations that lead an individual to commit to an organization (Kiesler, 1971; Salancik, 1977a). Meyer and Allen (1997) have described the construct of organizational commitment as, "a psychological state, but acknowledge that this state can develop retrospectively...as proposed in the behavioral approach, as well as prospectively...as advocated in the attitudinal approach" (p. 10). The definitions of organizational commitment that have come from these approaches are varied.

Organizational Commitment Defined

Mowday, Porter, and Steers' (1982) literature review have found no consensus on the definition of commitment. Some examples of definitions have included: (a) "affective attachment to the goals of the organization" (Buchanan, 1974, p. 533); (b) "a side bet, links extraneous interests with a consistent line of activity" (Becker, 1960); (c) "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization " (Mowday et al., 1982, p. 27); and (d) "socially accepted behaviors that exceed formal and/or normative expectations relevant to the object of commitment" (Weiner & Gechman, 1977, p. 48). Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) have argued that definitions and measures were not always compatible when describing organizational commitment as "a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals

and values...and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization" (p. 226). Rokeach (1979) has shown work values and attitudes were independent concepts in looking at organization commitment. The concept of organizational commitment is larger than loyalty and appears to be derived from the psychological requirement for attachment (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Allen and Meyer (1990a) have viewed organizational commitment as a multidimensional construct from a thematic grouping of the various definitions, and research in the area. Meyer and Allen (1991) have defined commitment as affective, continuance and normative:

> Affective commitment refers to the employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in, the organization...Continuance commitment refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization...normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. (p. 67)

The emotional dimension of commitment, which is what this researcher was interested in exploring, is described as affective element by Meyer and Allen (1990a) and has origins with such researchers as Kanter (1968) who has defined commitment as "the attachment of an individual's fund of affectivity and emotion to the group" (p. 507), and Sheldon (1971) who has said commitment is, "an attitude or an orientation toward the organization which links or attaches the identity of the person to the organization" (p.143).

Antecedents to Affective Commitment. The study of the concept of organizational commitment is focused in two ways: on the development of commitment through antecedents and the outcomes that might be predicted from organizational commitment. Commitment has served as both a dependent variable for several antecedents such as, age and tenure, and as an indicator of certain outcomes such as, turnover and performance (Dunham, Grube, & Castaneda, 1994: Weiner & Vardi, 1980).

The development of affective commitment has been said to begin with the recruitment and hiring practices of an organization. In Pinks (1992) the author has said that employees assess their value to the company based on, "expectations at the commencement of employment, and are strong measures as to whether these expectations are met or fall short" (p. 1). Meyer and Allen (1997) have agreed with Pinks asserting, "by using realistic job previews, organizations can increase the job satisfaction, (affective) organizational commitment, and job survival of new hires without having a negative impact on productivity" (p.70). However, Allen and Meyer (1990b) have found that role socialization at the beginning of a new job does not, over the long term, help with commitment.

Allen and Meyer (1990a) have found that affective commitment's antecedents were work experiences that encourage comfort in the organization and develop individual competence. Later Meyer and Allen (1997) have suggested a more specific definition of an employee with organizational commitment, stating that a "committed employee is one who stays with the

organization through thick and thin, attends work regularly, puts in a full day (and maybe more), protects company assets, shares company goals, and so on" (p. 3). Meyer, Irving, and Allen (1998) went even further and have found that work values and experience operate together to influence commitment to the organization.

Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) have suggested that the commitment of an employee to the organization leads to embedding the organization's goals and values with those of the employee, and is "an agreement by the employee to exert effort to those goals and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization" (p. 226).

In affective commitment, Fields (2002) has indicated that individuals who profess a high level of affective commitment continue with their organization because they want to, rather than as a result of an economic tie or moral obligation.

Organizational Commitment Outcomes. Ferris and Aranya (1983) have reported, "organizational commitment is becoming an increasingly used construct to predict performance, absenteeism and turnover" (p. 96). Liou and Nyhan (1994) have pointed out that management is recognizing the link between increased organizational commitment and higher levels of job performance, lower levels of absenteeism, and lower levels of employee turnover.

Pinks (1992) has asserted, "lower employee turnover; decreased absenteeism, longer job tenure; and enhanced performance" (p. 5) as reasons for developing organizational commitment among employees. Mowday, Porter,

and Steers (1982) have said "feelings of belonging and attachment, security, goals and direction, positive self-image, organizational rewards, and attractiveness to other potential employees" are positive outcomes to an individual who develops organizational commitment, while some negative consequences might be "reduced mobility and career advancement, reduced self-development and growth, family strains/tensions, and stress" (p. 138). Mowday et al. (1982) has further delineated outcomes into work groups and organizations. It would seem that positive results for the work groups are also positive results for the organization. "Membership stability, group effectiveness, and cohesiveness" or "groupthink, lower creativity and adaptation, and intra-group conflict" (p.138) are opposite sides of the coin that they have found for work groups. The authors have suggested an organization will obtain, "increased effectiveness due to individual effort; reduced turnover; reduced absenteeism; and reduced tardiness, and attractiveness to non-organizational members," but might also find "decreased effectiveness due to reduced turnover and reduced absenteeism, and lower innovation and adaptation" (p. 138). In Kehoe and Wright (2013), there was evidence that an individual's affective commitment is impacted not by an aggregate assessment of a group of employees on the value of HR practices of the organization.

In summary, the construct of commitment through the Meyer and Allen (1991) lens is a multidimensional concept that examines how certain attributes lead to an individual's commitment to the organization. This commitment could be affective (emotional attachment), continuance (cost consideration) or

normative (moral obligation). The outcomes of each of these commitments dimensions are different. This study is focused on affective commitment, rather than continuance or normative commitment.

Engagement

The concept of engagement was derived from the construct of organizational commitment (Meyer & Allen 1996), and from both the research of corporate strategy (Porter 1985) and the literature correlating corporate financial performance with human resource practices (Delaney & Huselid 1996; Huselid, Jackson & Schuler 1997). There is a rising interest by practitioners in utilizing the knowledge on engagement because it has spoken to three areas of concern: (a) the attraction of talent to the company; (b) the increase in performance by the employee and therefore the company; and also, (c) the retention of talented employees. While there has been some debate among scholars as to the validity of engagement as a separate construct, Saks (2006) has concluded “it is a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance” (p. 602).

The focus in this study is on the retention of employees. The Towers-Perrin Talent Report (2003) has broken engagement into two points: emotional and rational. The rational component means that employees have the resources to act, and the emotional component is that employees have the willingness to act. Here, we are interested in the emotional. Towers-Perrin have defined

engagement as, "the extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work" (p.1). As it relates to intention, their study has found that, "while high engagement doesn't guarantee retention...it does increase the chance of retaining [members]" (p.21). More specifically, their study has indicated that the top ten drivers for each of the three areas of concern (attraction, performance and retention) were different. This result has made it clear that a focus on only one set of drivers would not necessarily solve a company's problems. The most important elements for retention in their study has been opportunities for advancement and managerial effectiveness in regard to vision and goals.

Baumruck (2004) has cited 68% of the workforce as actually looking for employment or wanting to work somewhere else within 12 months. He has suggested that engagement is the solution for companies, and defined it as, "the state of emotional and intellectual commitment to an organization or group" (p. 9). The study has found that a 40% increase in engagement correlates to a 33% decrease in turnover. Baumaruck has described threats to engagement and drivers for engagement, but does not appear to distinguish them from attraction versus performance versus retention. The top three threats reported have been work tasks, intrinsic motivation and policies and procedures. The top three drivers found were career opportunities, policies and procedures, and senior leadership. There is striking similarity to the items in the Towers-Perrin Talent Report. The most interesting finding by Baumruck was the segmentation of engagement by tenure shown in (Figure 2.1).

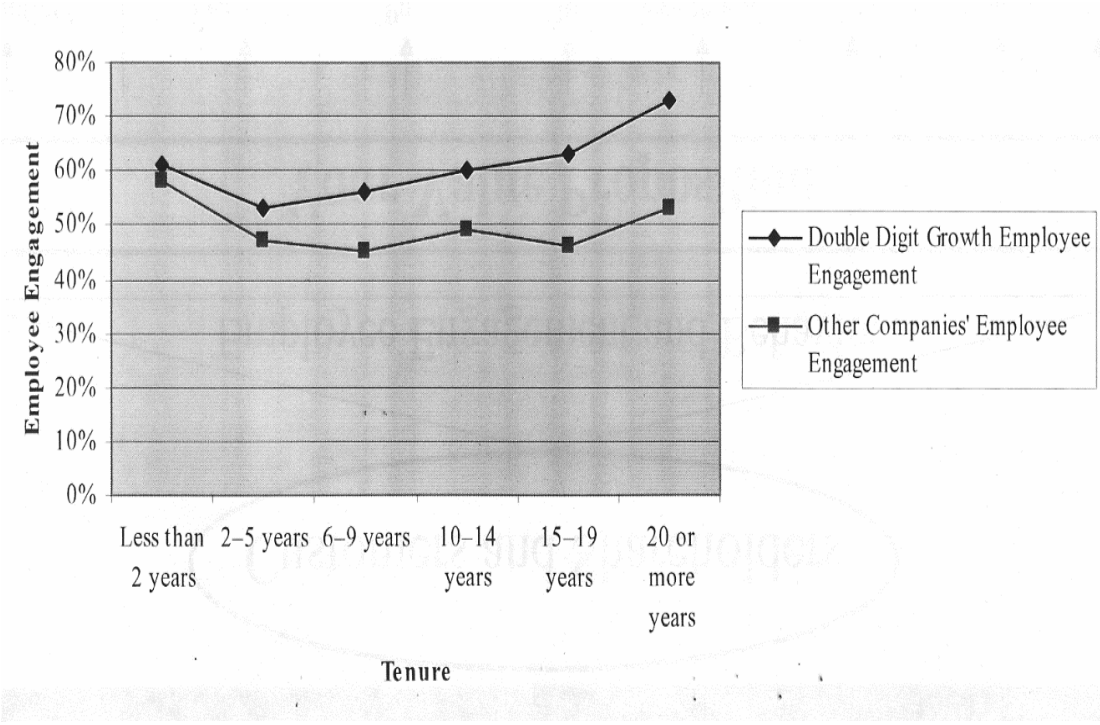

Figure 2.1. Employee Engagement by Tenure. Indicates jump in retention when employee engagement is increased by double digits.

The Corporate Executive Board [CEB] (2004) did a study on engagement stating clearly that the theoretical background for their study had been organizational commitment. However, they have created their own definition of what they called "purposeful engagement," The CEB has defined engagement as, "the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, how hard employees work, and how long they stay as a result of that commitment" (p. 4). They have further detailed this into "rational" and "emotional" commitment. Rational commitment has been defined as, "the extent to which employees believe that managers, teams or organizations have their self-interest in mind (financial, developmental, or professional)" and emotional commitment as, "the extent to which employees value, enjoy, and believe in

their jobs, managers, teams, or organizations" (p. 4). This research has resulted in a model that provides insight into the connection between these commitments and four areas of emphasis that lead to discretionary effort and/or intent to stay with a resulting increase in performance and retention. These areas are: day-to-day work, team, direct manager and organization. The Corporate Executive Board's research has found, "that as employees' move from the lowest level of commitment to the highest level of commitment, their probability of departure falls from 9.2% to 1.2%...For every 10% improvement in commitment, an employee's probability of departure decreases by 9%" (p. 28). The most interesting part of this study was the findings that while rational commitment as it relates to the organization and the team has had the most impact on intent to stay, it is the emotional commitment as it relates to the organization and then the manager that has the third and fourth most impact on intent to stay. It is the organization both from a rational and emotional focal point that has had the greatest impact on intent to stay. Surprisingly it has belied the traditional belief that employees don't quit companies, they quit managers. Yet their research has shown the manager is the most important in delivering the levers of commitment and the levers that they can pull the best are those related to emotional commitment.

In PwC (2013) NextGen: PwC has looked at its global workforce focusing on the differences between their Millennials (those born from the late-1980's through the early 200's) and non- Millennials as it related to fostering commitment. The rationale for this study was the lack of retention with the

Millennials and a lack of interest in the professional services life style of early years of extreme work schedules for partnership reward in later years. In the study, they have determined that work/life balance was a strong antecedent to driving commitment with all employees, but more pronounced with Millennials. The study has found that, “while the same basic drivers of retention exist for both Millennials and non-Millennials, their relative importance varies, with Millennials placing a greater emphasis on being supported and appreciated” (p. 9).

Job Embeddedness

This is not Granovetter's (1981) social embeddedness theory, but rather, a broad construct looking at how an individual becomes entrenched in a complex web of factors and links. Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez (2001) have said work incentives, and non-work issues, "provide clues as to attitude...search models only predict modestly well who leaves jobs" (p.1104). Their three-dimensioned model closely aligns with the Meyer and Allen organizational commitment model, but these authors have attempted to make distinction. The distinctions being made between this construct and organizational commitment are several, but essentially the authors have argued that their construct looks more holistically at factors that are beyond just the job or the organization, to determine how embedded the individual is in the organization.

Mitchell et al. (2001) have shown, "job embeddedness is conceived as a key mediating construct between specific on-the-job factors and off-the-job

factors and employee retention" (p. 1108). Their study is significant because it was a longitudinal study that went beyond intent to leave to determine the actual voluntary turnover 12 months after the administration of the survey. The results have indicated that job embeddedness is a good predictor of both intent to leave, and actual voluntary turnover. Holtom et al. (2005, 2006) have extended the discussion of this construct with their work on shocks and paths to voluntary turnover indicating it is these combinations that result in quick voluntary turnover versus the buildup of job dissatisfiers and embededdness that affect turnover.

Employee Identity Network Groups

Employee identity network groups have had a connection to the historical employee participation organization known as affinity groups. Affinity groups have owed their incubation to McCormick (1938, 1949). Charles McCormick of the McCormick & Company has created a concept of Multiple Management by forming a junior Board of Directors to empower employees in his company. The concept was a board junior to the regular board that would take ideas and proposals and if there was unanimity in pursuing the ideas, they would do so. Carlisle (1990) has written about additional affinity groups that followed the McCormick plan. Further copiers of the system ensued (Examples are described in Van Aken, Monetta, & Sink, 1993). From these cases we have learned about the characteristics and processes used in affinity groups. These organizations have formalized charters and roles. There are regular meetings and processes. In these cases, members come from the same occupation or job. All of these

groups are designed to increase employee participation in the processes to effectuate change within the primary organization mode.

According to Friedman, Kane, and Cornfield (1998), the employee identity network group is a form of employee involvement at its basic level. The employee involvement of these groups is different than many other involvement techniques in that the focus is on professionals and mid-career management employees. In fact, the charters of these organizations specifically have excluded those employees that are non-exempt under the Fair Labor Standards Act. It does not exclude them from participating in activities, and the by-laws have said that anyone interested in becoming management can participate (By-laws, African American Forum). However, in Hyde (1993) it was made clear the employment related issues are involved because an employee is not considered a professional or management must be beyond the scope of the affinity groups to avoid legal issues. An added value in the network groups has been the bringing together of employees that might not otherwise interact with each other. Van Aken, Monetta, and Sink (1993) have said these collateral organizations can help deploy change or initiatives throughout the organization.

A review of the literature on network or affinity groups does not yield much in the way of studies. Essentially, besides Childs (1992) who has written an essay on African American employee caucuses tracing them back to the caucuses historically created because of segregation, Friedman and his collaborators are the only researchers of this organization type. Childs used the African Methodist Episcopal Church as an example. He has looked at these

organizations as conflict creators to make change, suggesting, that "the caucuses consequently sees dispute as a necessary constructive correlate of organizational problem solving aimed at redressing structural inequalities" (p. 179). The caucuses have been formed for several reasons, including social networking, and support, training and development, but primarily because there is a need for change within the primary organization. These organizations had begun with an existence that was somewhere between acceptance and fear, but “if organizations are serious about ending embedded forms of racial inequality and encouraging diversity, then they will have to accept some degree of structural/philosophical transformation as part of a productive response to the caucus" (Childs, 1992, p. 196).

Friedman (1996) has shown caucuses or network groups to be a means to altering the perspective of social networks in large corporations. Friedman, similarly to Childs (1992), has seen the paradox of separatism and integration that an employee identity network mediates as competing values that can be navigated through the increase in network ties forged by the work of the networks. Friedman and Carter (1993) have said, "network groups provide a mechanism for women and minorities to learn of each other's existence, they provide occasional homophilous meetings that allow women and minorities to interact with greater comfort, and they provide contacts that expand the social networks of the people involved" (p. 325). Through these mechanisms, the employee identity network groups, while functioning in a separatist way, also have extended their members reach to non-minorities and non-women by

enlarging the circle of work associates of each member. Yet, these groups can only work within the constraints of the demographics of their larger organizations, which often have been less than fully diverse.

In Nooks-Wallner (2008), her dissertation has found, “69.2% of the respondents did not perceive benefits from membership and 94.6% did not perceive affinity groups as a useful leadership advancement program and there is certainly some apprehension on the part of the management of corporations with these identity networks” (p.147). Of course, some majority members of the larger organization have had some backlash attitudes towards the sub-organizations and their members regarding the attention paid by the company.

Digh (1997) has said well-managed employee identity networks can add business value, but also that "diversity specialists see the formation of employee networks as a potential danger and caution that the groups...can foster divisiveness and generate conflict" (p. 67). Specifically, Digh has shown the employee identity networks as innovative business tools in the attraction of clients and potential employees, and as a provider of employee development with both personal development programs and company specific training. She has said HR professionals can:

> Effectively manage network groups by ensuring there is a business reason for their existence, developing guidelines for establishing networks, recognizing employee needs for community and validation, and asking questions about the continuing role of the networks and their value to the company. (p. 72)

Over time these organizations have evolved and many are fixtures in the HR Practices toolkit often started by the Company and often expansive as to be more about interests than identity. Briscoe and Safford (2010) have suggested, “This evolution over time of the motivations behind the founding of affinity groups raises questions for both critics and advocates. In some ways, it retells a well-worn tale of mobilization and co-optation” (p. 46). O’Neil et al. (2011) has found in her study of women’s networks that, “there was a clear consensus among the members of the women’s network that the network was beneficial not only to network members but to the organization as well. They have viewed the network as value-added for the firm. In contrast, executives have framed the women’s network in terms of it being the firm’s first effort at increasing diversity” (p. 741).

Friedman, Kane, and Cornfield (1998) have looked specifically at African American network groups by surveying members of the National Black MBA Association (NBMBAA). According to Friedman et al., these groups had begun by employees who were a very distinct minority in their corporation and because of a desire to increase diversity in corporate America. They had distinguished this tool from other diversity tools because, "(1) it is one that attempts not only to change attitudes, but social interaction, (2) it tries to harness not only the resources of the corporation, but the resources of minority employees, and (3) it is organized by employees themselves, not management" (p. 1155). In doing these things, the groups had focused on self-help and organizational change. The authors have surveyed members of the NBMBAA, which is not the same as

in-house network groups, but is rather more like occupational professional associations. Their survey did, however, question the members of the NBMBAA about employee identity networks in their companies. In their survey, the results had indicated an impact on career optimism because of the mentoring relationships developed within the networks. One concern with this data is that the NBMBAA provides similar mentoring and contacts across corporations and likely would produce similar results in a survey. So one must wonder if the answers on the survey were all about the employee identity networks at each member's company or were they biased by attending the NBMBAA conference.

Friedman and Bogar (1999) have followed up Digh (1997) nicely in determining if Human Resource professionals were effectively managing employee identity networks. The authors had surveyed corporations to see what, if any, policies had been developed for employee identity networks, and whether the policies were formalized. The findings by the researchers were that many of the companies that have employee identity network groups formally had encouraged the formations of such groups, sometimes using the employee identity network groups' existence in their recruitment material, and also published in pamphlets or via their intranets, information on how to organize an employee identity network group within the company. Interestingly though, only about half the companies surveyed have any written policy in place concerning employee identity networks. When a policy was written, the authors had determined that they fell into the same areas for all companies: goals and mission, formation procedures, types of groups that are allowed, facility and

operational information, funding and prohibited activities (Friedman & Bogar, 1999).

The self-help strategy of employee identity network groups was examined in Friedman (1999). The author used his survey results from Friedman, Kane and Cornfield (1998). This article has addressed the benefit of the employee identity network in combating the social isolation that many minorities can feel in a large organization. He has found that, "social network theory applies in the employee network situation with the development of both strong ties (those made with similar members of the organization) and weak ties (those made from multiple networks and emerging networks" (p. 150). Conklin (2000) has suggested the same as it relates to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender [LGBT] community and these newer groups:

> It has provided a support structure for individuals who may have felt isolated or part of a small minority and given them an infrastructure for ongoing support. It has given those individuals a forum in which to raise concerns they have from their particular viewpoint that might not otherwise have received the level of exposure and attention they deserve. And it’s given senior leaders exposure that they would not otherwise have. (p. 16)

Employee identity network groups have accomplished both strong and weak ties, according to Friedman because, "the three core effects of network groups are to (1) help minority employees locate others from their identity group,

(2) help them contact each other, and (3) provide opportunities for them to meet in contexts where relationships are more likely to grow and develop" (p. 152). Friedman has asserted the strong ties made within the employee identity network groups, as well as the weak ties of just more contacts will also expand the individual into other networks that are broader than just the specific identity of the specific employee identity network since all members will have broader range of contacts than just their specific identity group. However, another concern is the participation of minorities in this available resource. In Friedman and Craig (2002), the authors had found that, “in addition to group identity, joining is driven by a fairly pragmatic cost-benefit calculus” (p. 810). Furthermore, based on their study, the authors have suggested more research is needed on whether the benefits minorities calculate come to fruition. This study is one piece of that additional research. Specifically, Friedman and Holtom (2002) did a study on the effects on intent to stay by network groups and have found a correlation. This particular study has explored the phenomenon of why participants in an employee identity network group stay for a period of 5-7 years.

Social Networks

Ibarra (1992) in studying networks of men and women in an advertising agency has suggested, "that availability of contact precedes and limits individual preferences" (p. 423). However, Friedman (1999) has said these homophilious networks expand their members' interaction into other networks in the organization leaving them with broader contacts within the organization. This is a direct link to the two types of networks described by Ibarra (1993).

Ibarra (1993) has made it clear that there are two different network matters going on at the same time. These two mechanisms have provided different things: the instrumental network typically provides the access to and control of resources affecting work issues; and expressive networks, which provide social support, mentoring and other benefits to members of the network. Ibarra's (1995) study of race in managerial networks has found that high-potential managers of color had different levels of homophily and intimacy in their organizational networks. In her study Ibarra has suggested a manager using a pluralist approach to building a network, along with one's own individualistic approach is the best way to develop an effective network. Specifically, Ibarra has said, "identity group homophily tends to be in direct competition with instrumental access for minority group members but not for whites" (p. 696). Further, she has found that "successful black managers develop instrumental relationships with white sponsors but do not rely on them extensively or exclusively for the psychosocial support they can obtain more readily from other minorities" (p. 897). However in McGuire (2002) in studying the informal networks of women and Blacks that were not homophilious she had found, “even when Black and white women had jobs in which they controlled resources and had network members who controlled resources, they received less informal help than white men did” (p. 316).

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Overview of Methodology

The intention of this chapter is to provide the methodology used in describing the lived work experience of professional/managerial employees. Presented here was the design of the study, including the site, sample, and procedures for obtaining and analyzing the data for the study. The purpose of this study has been to describe the essence of the lived work experiences of 16 professionals/managers in a large multinational corporation with tenure of between 5-7 years so as to contribute to the literature on employee identity network groups and managerial and professional's organizational commitment and employee engagement. The purpose has been to increase the practitioners' ability to sustain diversity in the workplace by exploring the experiences of individuals who have stayed with their employer for the 5-7 year time period. The approach to this study has been one of description, focusing on the experience of the participants first, through their meaning statements and then to move to the general psychological meanings as interpreted via textural and structural descriptions.

Research Design

This study has been an in-depth interview study of participants in an employee identity network group. It has examined the lived work experiences of these individuals focused on why they stayed with the site organization for a tenure period of between 5-7 years. Qualitative research has been the methodology of choice for this study because the research questions examined

the experiences of the participants in the study. Qualitative research seeks to describe and understand the participants' experiences in a particular situation rather than measure relationship between variables. In describing phenomenological study, Creswell (1998) has said it, "describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51). The key characteristics of qualitative research include: (a) a focus on field research or naturalistic inquiry; (b) the researcher as the instrument of data collection along with the participants; (c) the data as descriptive, but not statistical; (d) this data is inductively analyzed; and (e) the participant co-researchers' meaning is of critical importance (Bogden & Bicklen, 1992).

This study has used an empirical phenomenological research design to describe the lived work experience of professional and managerial employees working for a multinational company for a period of 5-7 years. The philosophical tenets and methods of Moustakas (1994) were present here. He has articulated the importance of studying the wholeness of a phenomenon by finding the phenomena as it is, without bias. Phenomenology is described as an unswervingly committed to the descriptions of experiences, and not explanation. The process sought a description that gives meaning to the essence of the experience.

In this study, the researcher has sought to obtain descriptions from individuals that allowed the creation of both textural descriptions and a structural description of the lived experience of working for the large multinational

corporation for a specific time. The narratives have developed into meaningful descriptions that can serve as a map for the organization to theorize about employee commitment and engagement. While an organization often has focused on the similarity across experience in an attempt to develop programs to address the organizational concerns, it will also be the differences in each individual's experience that will add texture to the understanding of the meaning in staving with the organization for 5-7 years. In this study of lived experiences we looked at the themes across the different groups and while phenomenology is often about searching for the commonalities in the phenomena studied as the researcher develops the meaning through themes, there is value in acknowledging and recognizing the variation in those themes. As stated by Akerlind (2005) “a primary feature of the constitution of categories of descriptions is the search for key qualitative similarities within and differences between the categories” (p.324). Miles and Huberman (1984) agree pointing out that “there are many times when differentiation is more important than integration” (p. 254).

Here, this researcher has attempted to put aside his preconceptions of the meaning of the data to focus on the meaning of the experience to the participant (co-researcher). The analysis shifted back and forth between the meaning units of each participant and this researcher’s interpretation of those meanings which are represented in the composite structural description. However important it has been to view the individual's personal lived experience as a valuable source of data to be analyzed, in a sense, the researcher has

moved beyond phenomenology in also developing a new template for practitioners.

Phenomenology has been the right approach because it explores the essence of the human experience and provides a structure for describing the experience within the context that the phenomenon takes place (van Manen, 1990). The phenomenological method is an inductive process, which has sought to describe the lived human experience. van Manen (1990) has stated that, "the aim of phenomenology is to transform live experiences into textual expression of its essence-in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience" (p. 36).

Phenomenology has acknowledged the personal interest of the researcher with the phenomenon being studied. The participants' and the researcher's reflection, and judgment has been the tools of phenomenology that are to be led by the research question. However, to obtain the worldview of the participants, the researcher has held in abeyance any personal assumptions about the experience. This is the epoche process, which as Moustakas (1994) has said, "It is a way of genuine looking that precedes reflectiveness, the making of judgments, or reaching conclusion" (p. 86). Avoiding these biases and assumptions has required bracketing or the setting aside of assumptions to understand the participant's meaning of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; van Manen, 1990). Creswell (1998) has indicated self-analysis and self-reflection by the researcher is most important for the initial steps of analysis. So I

have briefly described my interest in this research and further and provided my own data based on a semi-structured interview of myself.

The researcher interest in this study has come from my 25 years in human resources and employment law. More specifically, as an African American who has built a career in large multinational corporations and who had been present at the founding of the African American employee identity network in my company. The researcher has been fascinated by the opportunity to take the textual and structural descriptions of this experience and determine if it can guide the organization in its effort at building diversity and retaining top talent in a continuing dog-fight by large corporations for the best and the brightest. The next section addresses the research questions.

Research Questions

The research question was: What is the meaning of the lived experience of professional/managerial employees who stay employed in this corporation for a period between 5-7 years?

There were other questions explored:

1. What elements of affective commitment came out of the experience of these professional/managerial employees?
2. What role does the employee identity network have in the affective commitment of these participants to the organization?
3. What difference is there in the organizational networks of diverse employees as compared to White American Male Employees?
4. What choices in the participants experience led to this tenure?

The interview protocol used is found in Appendix A. The next section describes the site selection.

Site Selection

The site is a large multinational, Fortune 500 Company, which has several employee identity network groups: including one for African Americans, one for Hispanic Americans, and one for Asian Pacific Americans. These groups had been organized by the employees to improve diversity in the company as a whole, to increase the diverse population in the managerial and professional ranks and to provide support, training and networking opportunities for their particular group. The next section discusses the study sample and participant selection.

Study Sample and Participant Selection

The study sample has been selected from an employee population represented by employee identity network groups of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans and from White American Male employees (who do not have an employee identity network group, and have not participated in one of the other groups). The employees had been professional/managerial employees below the executive ranks of the subject organization whether or not they were mid-career hires or hires directly out of school. In addition, these employees had participated in the employee identity network groups (except those White American Male employees) and had between 5-7 years of service.

Another selection criterion had been based on the participants' voluntary agreement to participate in the study and their availability to describe their experience in writing and in two interrogatory dialogues (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Appendix B (Letter to HRM's: Voluntary Solicitation) has informed potential participants about the study and sought voluntary participants. The sample has been a purposeful sample (Patton, 1990). The sample has included four members of each group: (a) African American employee participants in the African American employee identity network; (b) Asian Pacific American employee participants in the Asian Pacific employee identity network; (c) Hispanic American employee participants in the Hispanic employee identity network; and (d) White American Males who do not participate in an employee identity network. All subjects have been employed by the corporation for between 5-7 years, at the time of participation.

Admittedly, the determination of sample size is one that was ambiguous in qualitative research. However, there has been guidance based on the type of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Dukes, 1984; Polkinghouse, 1989). The importance of phenomenology is to study the phenomenon in detail. In this case, the phenomenology has been the lived-experience of these managerial employees. There has been much guidance, recommendation or rules of thumb provided by the scholarly experts. Creswell (1998) has stated that in phenomenology, "the process of collecting data involves primarily in-depth interviews …with as many as 10 individuals" (p. 122). In Dukes (1984) cited in Creswell, the recommendation has been between 3 and 10 subjects.

Polkinghome (1989) has suggested that 10 subjects is sound given that in-depth interviews are utilized. Patton (1990) has said that, “in depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information rich” (p. 184).

From a list of employees provided by the Human Resources Department, and categorized by EEO classification, a letter has been sent to those fitting the selection criteria explaining the study and asking for their participation. From those indicating interest, participants had been randomly select. The following section describes the data collection methods.

Data Collection Methods

The George Washington University Institutional Review Board (IRB) process has been followed, and signed consent forms assured participant’s confidentiality. Seidman (1998) developed a three interview process for qualitative research that had been considered by this researcher, but Giorgi (1986) has depicted the basis for description data and Svensson (1986) elaborated on a process for this type of research that includes: (a) a written protocol; (b) reflection by the researcher; (c) an interview of the participant; (d) synthesis; (e) development of meaning units; and (f) the essence of the phenomenon. Here, the researcher had followed Svenson lead (1986), and data collection has been a written description and two in-person, in-depth interview of 16 participants. The data, in the form of the written, descriptions, audio tapes, and transcribed interviews have been and will be maintained in the strictest confidence, kept under lock and key during the process, and with references to

the real identity removed from the data. The real identities can no longer be linked; as these have been destroyed after analysis was completed. The sanitized transcripts will be made available for five years, upon request by other researchers.

There was an initial interview that had aimed at developing rapport between the researcher and the participants, and at obtaining basic demographic information about the participant. Also, this initial interview has been used to gain insight into how the individual came to work for the site company, the expectations the individual had in coming to the site organization, and how well that expectation has been met.

The written description has been in response to the following directions stated as follows:

> Please describe in as much detail, and as vividly as possible, experiences where you thought of leaving the organization, but did not. Include in this description how the situation arose, the experience of not leaving, how it unfolded, and how it ended. Provide as much information and detail as you can recall so that an unfamiliar individual would have a very clear idea of what happened by reading your description.

An interview has followed the initial contact. The presentation of the written description has been used to obtain clarifying detail of the participants' accounts of their experiences. The second set of interviews had been a semi-structured open-ended questions based on the information provided in the

participants' written accounts and the information provided in the initial interview. In addition, the interview has focused on the overall experiences of working for this particular company for a period of between 5-7 years, and has allowed the participants to reflect on the meaning of establishing tenure. The researcher has audiotaped the interviews of each participant. The audiotapes have been transcribed. At the same time, contemporaneous detailed notes have been taken following each of the interviews. In addition, notes of recollections of the interviewer/researcher that may not have been collected contemporaneously. The data analysis method is discussed next.

Data Analysis Methods

Patton (1990) has said, "The challenge is to make sense of massive amounts of data and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal" (p. 371). Moustakas (1994) has spoken of horizonalization. He has said, "We consider each of the horizons and the textural qualities that enable us to understand an experience" (p. 95). In order to do this properly, the researcher has set aside any personal pre-conceived notions on how to see the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Yet there has been interpretation involved in the data. As van Manen said, "all recollections of experiences, reflections on experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences are already transformations of these experiences" (p. 54). Thus, it is important to have recognized that the data collected from the series of interviews was a remembered experience. What the subject reflects and remembers has been impacted by both their history prior to

the event remembered and since that event occurs. However, these experiences and the meaning attached to them have been part of the person's essence, and important to the decisions made as a part of this phenomenon.

The data has been analyzed using horizonalization by considering noteworthy declarations related to the lived work experience of the participants, while considering each statement equally (Moustakas, 1980, 1994). The researcher has picked out those phrases that are similar, as well as distinct and that do not overlap. It has required considering each of the declarations as being germane to the meaning of the participant in his or her description of the phenomenon. It is this parsing of the meaning units of each participant (co-researcher) that has helped to arrive at a meaningful understanding of the individual experience. From this understanding of each participant's lived experience the researcher arrived at these manifestations of meaning that came together as themes. Themes have been referred to by Moustakas (1994) as structures. He has called structures, "the feelings, sense experiences, and thoughts" (p. 78) that lead to textural descriptions. In this study, prior to focusing on composites, the researcher developed individual textural descriptions of the individuals' experiences, and also individual structural descriptions. The themes in the individual descriptions have been the basis for drafting composite textural-and-structural-descriptions of the lived experiences. These descriptions have been the source for composing a structural description. The description has arrived by an analysis of each subject's textural description, and then interpretation and synthesis by the researcher of these descriptions, which has

revealed the essence of this phenomenon. This is what Moustakas (1994) has described as a "description of the essences of the experience...presenting a picture of the conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it" (p. 35). This has been an interpretation as the researcher edited and revised themes based on the descriptions of each participant. According to Ihde (as cited in Moustakas, 1994), the researcher arrives at a synthesis of the noema (the what of experience) and the how of the experience.

Moustakas (1994) has been the right framework for analysis of this study because he has allowed for both the individual experience to emerge and be valued, but has recognized that the structural essence of the experience provides an additional rich source for understanding the experience of professional and managerial employees who stayed with the organization for between 5-7 years.

Human Participants and Ethics Precautions

This section discusses consideration for human participants and ethical considerations.

Consideration for Human Participants

Each participant has been provided a description of the study (Appendix C: Letter to Prospective Subjects) and has been asked to sign a consent form (Appendix D: Content Form) to volunteer as a participant. The participants has understood the purpose of the study and could at any time of their choosing withdraw from the study. Participants have bene given the opportunity to reviewed transcripts and make any changes.

In addition, participants had been assured confidentiality and all identifying data have been removed from their transcripts. A pseudonym had been assigned to each participant and upon completion of results the key that identified the participants to their assigned pseudonym have been destroyed. The actual transcripts have not been published as part of this dissertation and are maintained in a secure locked file cabinet. These sanitized transcripts will be made available upon request for a minimum of five years after publication to other researchers. These actions have protected participant's confidentiality.

Ethics Precautions

Miles and Huberman (1994) have pointed to five areas for evaluating qualitative research results. The areas are: (a) objectivity and confirmability; (b) reliability, dependability and auditability; (c) internal validity, reliability and authenticity; (d) external validity, transferability; and (e) fittingness; utilization, application and action orientation.

Confirmability and Objectivity

In evaluating qualitative research confirmability and objectivity are factors addressed by the researcher. This relates to the ability to confirm or corroborate the results of the research. This researcher has proceeded with describing his own textural description in accordance with the interview protocol to the participants of this study so as to be clear about my background and its possible bias. The researcher in this study has allowed participants to review their transcript and note any corrections if he/she wished (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, the researcher has actively searched for and has described any

negative instances that contradict my prior observations or conceptual framework.

Reliability, Dependability and Auditability

Reliability, dependability and auditability are other factors a qualitative researcher must consider. The researcher has been responsible for consistency throughout the study. The audiotaped interviews had been transcribed verbatim. The researcher has taken contemporaneous notes to assure accuracy in data collection including describing the circumstances in which the research takes place, and anything that affects a change in the setting or the process of the study. The use of thick textural-structural descriptions along with the structural description of the experience has aided in this study's dependability. All contact, whether in person, by phone or written correspondence has been maintained as a log for each participant. In addition, committee members have provided an appropriate review of the results and conclusions.

Internal Validity, Credibility and Authenticity

The textural descriptions of the individual participants and their ability to correct statements from the verbatim transcript has provided a level of assurance of validity and authenticity. In another attempt to ensure credibility and objectivity, the interview structure and protocol had been used in a small pilot version of this study by interviewing and reporting on two African American employees with slightly less than seven years of tenure.

External Validity, Transferability and Fittingness

In qualitative research there are no claims of generalizability. External validity, transferability and fittingness are the qualitative equivalent. It is the researcher's responsibility to have a complete and thorough study by describing the context and assumptions to this study, however, it is the responsibility of the reader to determine transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have confirmed this by stating, "it is not the naturalist's task to provide and index of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of any potential appliers" (p. 316). In this study, the data has been obtained as a comparative study of diverse employees and their individual experiences. However, individual readers of this dissertation should see the plausibility of these experiences in other settings and make their own assessment of value. It is important to understand that Yin (1989) has also recognized the limitation of generalizability in qualitative research pointing out that qualitative studies broaden and generalize theories.

Utilization, Application and Action Orientation

This study will have utility for the readers both in terms of filling a gap in the research for maintaining tenure through the five year period, as an extension of the work of Friedman et al. (1998) on employee identity networks and their contribution to intent to stay, and as an aid to the management practitioner as to better understand what was important in the diverse employee experience for staying beyond five years. Moreover, these lived experiences can provide assistance to employees as to what goes into a longer tenure with an employer.

Qualitative researchers must be concerned with trustworthiness, confirmability, transferability and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These authors, and Miles and Huberman (1984) have recommended various actions that can be taken to ensure the validity and reliability of a study. Patton (1990) has required, "searching for rival explanations, explaining negative cases, triangulation, and keeping data in context" (p. 472). Additional concerns, such as researcher behavior and bias have also been considered. Power as a researcher is another consideration. This researcher was at a higher level in the hierarchy than the participants in the study, and as both a long time HR executive and employee identity network leader was particularly vigilant. In this study, power considerations have been recognized and acknowledged. Any appearance of coercion to participate has been addressed by utilizing a different participant. Establishing the credibility of the researcher has been important. In this case, the researcher's position with the company and role in the employee identity network could have had the opposite effect than power and be helpful in establishing researcher's credibility. On the other hand, because of this same background, and previously discussed background, the researcher has suspended judgment so as to eliminate as much bias as possible when conducting the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter highlights the composite textural description of the lived experiences of each ethnic group in a large multinational corporation, along with the researcher's structural description of that lived experience utilizing the researcher's interpretation and a discussion of the emergent themes. For the purposes of protecting the identity of the large multinational corporation, the researcher has changed the name of the corporation to "Acme" in transcriptions and other written descriptions. Acme is a pseudonym. In addition, the chapter includes a demographic table of the study participants. There were sixteen(16) participants: four(4) White American Males, four (4) African Americans including two(2) females and two(2) males, four(4) Hispanic American males and four(4) Asian Pacific Americans including two(2) females and two(2) males.

Table 4.1 displays the basic data of each participant and is followed by a composite textural description of each ethnic group and is derived from their words and a composite structural description derived from the researcher's interpretation. van Manen (2006) has told us, "It is precisely in the process of writing that the data of the research are gained as well as interpreted and that the fundamental nature of the research question is perceived. In a phenomenological sense, the research produces knowledge in the form of texts that not only describe and analyze phenomena of the life world but also evoke understandings that otherwise lie beyond their reach"(p. 715). The composite textual descriptions and structural descriptions are presented here alone.

The characteristics of the 16 participants that have made up the composite textural descriptions are summarized here in Table 4-1

Table 4.1. *Characteristics of Participants Interviewed*

Pseudonym	Age, Gender	Ethnicity	Position	Network Org.	Education Level	Marital Status	Tenure
MB	43, M	White	Manager Finance	NA	BS	Married	7
MC	33, M	White	Bus Dev. Finance Manager	NA	BS	Married	5.5
CV	37, M	White	Quality Leader	NA	Masters	Married	6
JH	40, M	White	Manager, Bus Dev.	NA	BA	Married	6
GD	42, M	African-American	Account Manager	AAF	BS	Married	6
AW	34, F	African-American	New Product Leader	AAF	PHD	Married	6.5
TT	34 F	African-American	Quality Ops Leader	AAF	Masters	Single	7
KS	29, F	African-American	IT Black Belt	AAF	BS	Single	5
JM	37, M	Hispanic-American	Data Warehouse Manager	HISPA	BS	Married	6
AF	35, F	Hispanic-American	Sourcing Manager	HISPA	Masters	Married	6
MB	30, M	Hispanic-American	VP Risk	HISPA	Masters	Married	5.5
CG	41, M	Hispanic-American	Manager, IT Portfolio	HISPA	Masters	Married	7
JS	33, F	Asian-Pacific American	Project Manager	APAF	PHD	Married	5
AI	31, M	Asian-Pacific American	Human Resource Manager	APAF	Masters	Married	5.5

Pseudonym	Age, Gender	Ethnicity	Position	Network Org.	Education Level	Marital Status	Tenure
PY	37, F	Asian-Pacific American	Sales Representative	APAF	Bachelors	Married	6
GI	29, M	Asian-Pacific American	IT Operations Leader	APAF	Masters	Married	7

White American Males

Composite Textural Description

The White American Males (non-members of the employee network groups), lived experience of commitment to the large multinational corporation) began with someone reaching out to them on behalf of the Acme.

It could have been a contact within the Acme but often it was a representative for the Acme such as a recruiter. They had listened because of who the Acme was and what the career opportunity could be. “The recruiter made the job sound very interesting and the name of the Acme and its brand made me listen. I thought since it was billed as building a new team that it would give me added experience and of course, the visibility. There was high exposure.” This attraction to the company was not only based on the identity of the company but also the preview of the role given to them by both the recruiter and the organization if they came in for an interview.

Upon employment, how the socialization was handled played an important role. “I was pulled into a trusted little circle.” These subjects had enjoyed the roles and saw the potential for advancement, but also had realized the need for connection to the needs of the corporation. “So I would always tell

the headhunters and for that matter anyone in my network about my commitment in time to the role. If you work well with people they're going to become your promoter, so as they leave and go out and you maintain relationships that how I think you build a network."

They had seen advancement as a double-edged sword because the size and complexity of the organization presented new challenges and learning but also the possibility of derailment. They have realized the need for mentors and sponsors if they were to get what they wanted from the organization:

> It was probably the toughest thing because I figured—well to be honest, my mentor was going to give me the next growth opportunity or do I go where I wanted to go because I didn't see the career path. Acme is such a large integrated company and there is a correct pedigree and there is a playbook that you must find out about and follow. The first time he told me go, this time I had to ask him, and he found me interviews.

Learning and recognizing the demands of the company had allowed these employees to stay with their goals, the tension between individual goals and organizational goals did show up:

> I was in that role right around four years and it became rough. Around the three and one half to four year mark, I'm thinking okay, I've got a couple more black belts certified [Six Sigma quality experts], our data process group is okay and once again I'm ready, I'm ready to get out. I would say two and a half to three years into it, I started saying, Where's my career

path here? Where do you go next? I didn't feel completely landlocked, like I couldn't go anywhere but I didn't see a lot of opportunities within the business itself that is the local business.

Here is when the group realized the need for contacts within the organization.

Prior to the four year period, mentors and bosses as sponsors had seemed to get them the first or even the second role. "I quickly found out it was a pretty tight knit group of folks who had all been around each other so it took a while to crack the shell. I realize Acme really is a small world. It's very relevant that there are people that all of a sudden are in all these different businesses. Having a network certainly helps. "

The network of contacts has been one of the most important factors as time went on and this was often the downfall and potential derailing that could lose the engagement of the individual. "It was a little tough looking for a new role in Acme. I think one of the things is its just getting that sponsorship and getting the opportunity. I think one of the things is just the way it happened for me. I felt like I was completely on my own. I'd lost contact."

This frustration had them looking at others in the organization and wondering how they could find what was provided to some groups:

This is what the internal groups do. They put on speakers, share what's going on in the industry and you make connections that make it easier for you to pick up the phone and call somebody. If I met them somewhere

less formal, and kind of get to know them, it is easier to share. Now in the situation I'm in now, if I had to look for a job tomorrow, it's almost easier to go outside, I just go to X and knock on the door to interview. Here I have to get permission from you, then my boss, and that guy, the other guy, get released, interview at 100 places. I think I should have purposely gone out with my contacts more frequently and networked more, I think I've dropped my network for whatever reason, and that was a mistake on my part. I think the networking is the easiest way to get a job.

Despite the frustration, the connection to the organization and to their lives outside of the company had provided impetus to continue the search for career advancement or at least for satisfaction within them with what they are doing.

I became the perfect Acme employee. I got a mortgage and got married. When I was single, I probably would have more easily jumped ship and taken a risk, but now that I had a mortgage and was married I was less willing to take any risks. I stayed in that job for a couple of reasons: it provided enough variety and an opportunity to go out and meet new people and have new, different types of deals, different assets. I loved the training they'd given me. It's hard to argue with a Fortune 500 company.

As the maturing process had continued, and the rest of life intervened, it is the realization that a good place to work, with meaningful things to do came into play. "Your career path was going to be pretty tight; unless you're really

interested in making a huge move and relocating your family or whatever. And you had to take it upon yourself to do that. Don't get me wrong, there were some great experiences; I mean I thrive to be exposed to the kind of stuff I worked on."

Greater commitment to the organization has come with recognition that the grass was not necessarily greener elsewhere:

> At that time, I did sort of poke around to see what else was out there. If I'm going to cash in my Acme equity, the first chance that you cash it in is probably your best chance of making a wallet with it, right? If I was going to leave, I wanted it to mean something. They just didn't fit with what I wanted to do at that time perfectly. And some of them involved relocating and my wife works. Acme does have a nice ring to it you know, and I think there are a lot of people that take a lot of pride in it. When they're at a cocktail party and somebody asks them, 'Where do you work?' I work for Acme.

And likely the ultimate understanding of their experience and what it meant has been summed up as:

> It's a lot of things that aren't directly related to the job, interestingly enough. I came back to Philadelphia because I want to raise my family here. I wanted to get out of the New York suburbs. You're willing to put up with a certain amount of hassle or negativity, whatever you want to call it, but you're willing to put up with a certain amount of that stuff, because there is that ability to live and be home in five or ten minutes. You're in

an area you like. Your wife's got a job. You don't really want to leave. You're working for a good company but you also have to weigh getting ahead**.**

Composite Structural Description

The structural description of organizational commitment for these White Male individuals had derived from the juxtaposition of the potential for career growth and the nature of the company for which they worked. It had begun as an attraction to both the identity of the company and its reputation and the intrigue of the position for which they are being recruited. "The recruiter made the job sound very interesting and the name of the company and its brand made me listen."

This attraction has been captured by a clear and thorough introduction to both the job and the company. The idea of opportunities that will advance their career has created a unique situation for the company to engage these White American Males by bringing them into the fold through exposure to leaders and the mores and procedures of the company. "There is a certain pedigree and there is a playbook that you must find out about and follow."

However, advancement has not been as simple as do a good job and continue the upward mobility. The lived experience is not only performance and grasping the Acme way, but also finding the right mentors and sponsors to have assisted in navigating the intricacies of such a large organization.

The size of the organization has been both a blessing and a curse to these subjects in that they were seduced by the varied industries and concurrent job opportunities, but can cause some paralysis in finding the right roles with the right leader. There must have been something else that kept them glued to the company. In this case, there were three elements that were most important, “I was about the continued growth and the connections to the people, particularly the decision makers, but most importantly, the people that worked with me. I made a commitment to the people and if I left them I would be abandoning them.”

Over the course of time, age and maturity, family and community ties had come into play. The employees have been still looking for growth and opportunity, but the demands of family and involvement in community can temper those, but the many locations and career choices can provide the flexibility in meeting the needs of the family and community. “It’s a lot of things that aren’t directly related to the job, interestingly enough. I came back to Philadelphia because I want to raise my family here. I wanted to get out of the New York suburbs.”

African Americans

Composite Textural Description

The experience of African Americans in this organization had begun just like those of their white male counterparts. It had been about an initial attraction. However, in these subjects’ experience the initial contact often had stemmed from a more personal contact:

I actually came to an AAF event about a year before I came to Acme so that was a tremendous influence on me. The network was very strong so the transition wasn't bad at all. They flew me in, and I met a lot of people at the site. They made me feel really good. In the job, I got invited to a lot of business meetings and had a lot of sponsors and mentors in my early time there.

While the initial onboarding went smoothly, there have been anxiety still around not fully knowing mixed with excitement about the future.

I got up there for the interview but I didn't see what all Acme has to offer in terms of the orientation process, first couple of weeks of training. I'm not just getting training; I'm getting knowledge out of it. I'm getting some education and some training. That's going to be a win for me. However, I had to find a job after the training without knowing where I might end up. That was kind of tough. My difference is when I pack up and move, I've got to have my family move with me and at that point I did not know if they were with it.

As with other participants in this study, the manager or supervisor had played an important role, "One of the things that made it ok was that I did work for one of the people that I really respected. The tough thing that I had to do was turn down an opportunity with him because I wanted to do something different."

Yet like the others, when a difficult decision came up, mentors have been integral to reaching a conclusion. “I leveraged people I trusted to ask them more candid questions as to what were the implications for turning it down. I felt apprehensive about saying no. It was this situation that made me realize the true value of mentors and sponsors.” However, sometimes the network can push you into things you aren’t sure about and this has created its own anxiety.

> So while the program was great, and the feeding into the program was smooth, the finding of my first real job was kind of disconcerting. So there was a period of time when I did not know what was going to happen. You have responsibility to find your own job, and the programs generally give you about two months to find something before they set you loose, out of the Acme. At the end of the program, I was told to take a job. This made me feel like I did not have control and I felt I was losing myself by being coerced into places. My network within the AAF, as well as my reputation for getting things done has presented me with the choice of staying within the current unit or moving.

All of these network pearls of wisdom had to be sifted by the individual and synthesized for their best interest:

> I actually have to credit Art, an officer of Acme and an African American Forum leader, in many regards for something he told the group some time ago…at some point you are going to have to learn how to turn down a job in the right way and because of that you have to be ready to articulate

very clearly what your career goals and objectives are, and what sought of development needs and competencies you need to develop as you go through this professional development and maturation.

As the career progresses there have been hurdles to overcome.
The new job was just short of disastrous. There was no support and there were no systems. I learned about style, made progress by using my mentors and other supporters to get through the process. It had been during this time that I became more involved in the network group. So, I had a lot of people around me that encouraged me.

It is during the difficult times that the commitment has been tested:
You know there are a lot of people that leave within two years and five years. I heard the story even before they started showing concern. They leave too early, which is what I heard from people that I trusted. Then they have no or little to no runway left. Not as much opportunity for growth and development.

The commitment that had been developed through the mentors, was stretched beyond limits here, but the mentorship and leader connections made with the employee identification network had come through.

In my mind I had a goal I wanted to achieve. So I mean in my mind, I was going to do it in Acme. And if I had to, and I believe Acme is absolutely a

great company, but if I ended up having to leave then that's just a decision that I had to make. So I wasn't itching to leave. But again the frustration of not being able to get the broadening experience was real. I had mixed emotions…the backing of good people, my network, and the leaders of the affinity group, versus the work. Acme wants edge, but it is difficult to manage edge. I started looking for a new job, but was asked not to look. But I didn't want to leave, my job ended…it was not so much Acme I didn't want to leave, but rather the people.

The employee identification network has been a plus here, but it can still be too little if the person does not make a commitment within the sub organization of the network.

Personal friends, contacts, mentors, the AAF network and just some of the people that I trust just to talk to helped me realize that moving outside of Acme is not necessarily the answer to get you to where you want to be. So I think my support system is the main thing that kind of helped me---informal mentors. Going to ES was a risk. I wasn't growing, and didn't get the skills I was told I would receive, but I did get more contacts. The nature of ES was that the contacts were in the regional network. This support resulted in me being the hub leader for the network group.

The importance of a strong and broad network was clearly required when career derailing had occurred, but it is the commitment had been built over time with the organization that was needed to carry one through:

> The relationship with my manager started to deteriorate and change. The role ended. There were a whole lot of lessons learned. To some degree, you stop believing in yourself, but I did have some job offers. I was convinced to stay by the HR leader. It was emotionally and physically draining. It takes time to get support from people in the business. Your mentors and sponsors can only do so much. It was really taxing going through this. In interviewing, they say they love you, but others come behind you and undermine you.

Those individuals that actually had participated as opposed to only attending certain functions gained not only valuable insights but also connections that later had become sponsors:

> I have been active with the Chapters in the East and now in Chicago. I just wish I could get more folks involved. My participation has certainly been a way for me to meet a lot of people. It has enhanced my network, and I think increased my sponsorship. The one thing it does is give me a broader cross function and business network that I have not developed outside of Acme.

In addition to providing a knowledge base about the company, the identification network had developed connectivity to mentors and sponsors:

> When the AAF symposium comes around, it brings me back. It gives me that outlet that I've been looking for when I go to meetings. When I go to normal business meetings, I'm just this person in the minority. Sometimes you kind of pain for wanting just to be able to interact and just to find out what's going on in the community? And I see a lot of people doing the same thing so I think that helps. It helps bridge that gap between that loneliness time and that time of frustration. I'm just saying it's given me friendship outside of my regular job.

The added value proposition of the employee network has been camaraderie in coexisting in an organization often hostile to a particular group:

> I would ask these people: how do you go through an organization like Acme and really be successful? You can really see some of the hurt even that they experienced because of the sacrifice that you make from your family. For me, I have made some sacrifices. The business thinks you can't do anything right, and undermines what you think of yourself, and who you are. It required a strong spiritual background and knowing what the goal is. You want to get your credibility back, but a vicious cycle keeps you down. But you get in the game. This process changes who you are. Now I am not doing it for approval. If doing what I like and developing

skills and capability, then ok because paradigm can shift on you. I am a little bit timid and more cautious.

The isolation of the larger organization became more evident when one had experienced a truly diverse organization built through the connections made in multiple employee identification networks:

> The team of people that was being assembled, and being in Art's business as well was enticing. I had a lot of family, so to speak in this business so what could be a better opportunity. My current manager is African American, and I work with an array of ethnic groups. This is huge step up. The manager is well respected, has credibility and is very comfortable with others. The experience now is exhilarating. We are groundbreaking, challenging, with a full workload. I face it with a different approach because I have support from my manager, team and business to do good job, as well as my network of support both within the company and outside. I feel like doing a good job. I feel a sense of ownership. I have some say. It is a huge difference and challenging.

A balanced network of support and proper career development only had developed new skills, but also had created a new self-awareness:

> I didn't expect that would be the main growth area. I expected more on skill sets etcetera. I am not as emotional as I had been. No one ever told me about this. It is not good or bad. Evolution of the world we live in. If we

> don’t grow from it, it is not necessarily a good thing. I see growth of self. I see what I want to be around or be like as a leader from more examples than would like of what don’t want to be or be around.

The development of self-awareness and then proper reflection on oneself has led to inner peace and organizational commitment:

> My spiritual belief kept me calm. I didn’t feel that I should go. I felt something would change. For the first time, I wasn’t at peace with leaving. This time was more spiritual. I was always spiritual, but the last time I relied more on what my mentor was saying, but what the spiritual was saying was not in conflict.

Composite Structural Description

The experience of the African Americans in this study was not unlike the White American Males or other participants. They have been attracted to Acme because of the potential for career development, learning and success in a varied career. Specifically, Acme had provided a high reputation identity organization with the ability, or at least the perceived ability to move up and along a strong career path based on your performance and visibility.

However, there are differences. Often prior to onboarding in the organization, the African American had an outreach contact with the employee identity network prior to arriving at their site, or at a minimum was introduced to that segment of the larger organization early on. This has appeared to assist

them in the transition from outsider to insider by giving them access to knowledge of the unwritten rules, and for that matter, to the written rules and language of the company.

Nevertheless, this introduction hadn't alleviated the normal anxiety of facing the unknown without being in control, nor had resolved the family needs. "I'm getting knowledge out of it…However, I had to find a job after the training without knowing where I might end up…My difference is when I pack up and move, I've got to have my family move with me and at that point I did not know if they were with it."

The experience of the African American as they had progressed through time in the Acme was important in the development of organizational commitment. As the opportunities had arose there came a time where a conflict over the individuals' desires and the organization's needs didn't match. When this has occurred, the network of mentors and sponsors was very important. "I felt apprehensive about saying no. It was this situation that made me realize the true value of mentors and sponsors." But the identity network had given more. There has been a definite need for camaraderie. This often had come from the connection made with the employee identity network. This is not unlike the other subjects need for connection, but in the experience of the African Americans, a connection to a community of like employees had seemed of particular value. Often there has been a sense of isolation or disconnect that affected their careers:

> When I go to normal business meetings, I'm just this person in the minority. Sometimes you kind of pain for wanting just to be able to interact and just find out what going on in the community…It helps bridge the gap between that loneliness time and that time of frustration. I'm just saying it's given me friendship outside of my regular job.

When the career seemed to derail, a need for trusted colleagues has been most often met through the employee identity network. "Personal friends, contacts, mentors, the AAF network and just some of the people I trust just to talk to helped me realize that moving outside of Acme is not necessarily the answer to get you to where you want to be." These connections have shared a common experience that allowed these participants to find benefits in the current assignment while pursuing or waiting for the next door to open. "It has enhanced my network, and I think increased my sponsorship."

The efforts of the identity network and the individuals overall support system has led to a sense of peace within the organization. This peace had come from a development of self-awareness along with the job skills that allows the individual to thrive and be more committed to their role and the organization. "My spiritual belief kept me calm. I didn't feel that I should go. I felt something would change. For the first time, I wasn't at peace with leaving.

Hispanic Americans

Composite Textural Description

In these instances, the recruits to Acme had some work experience and had been expatriates to the United States. Often they knew little of “Acme’s” breadth and depth other than the particular business unit for which they had begun Acme employment.

My history has been to stay a short time for every company prior to Acme. “My search was more focused because I was trying to gain more general positions and I didn’t have in mind that Acme was strong in business development and had merger, equity and acquisitions area.” However, it was the attraction of a United States company that had the added draw:

> I would have better growth opportunities in the US, more of what you want and you can move in different areas and learn things. So when I got my green card, I turned to Acme. You want to work in manufacturing, transportation, whatever. There are many more businesses than any other company. The whole initial Acme experience was good, and the work and the challenge is what made me want to sign on. I saw a big opportunity and the big size of Acme.

Since they had not been raised in the United States, the culture of Acme was even a little more difficult for them, despite “Acme’s” alleged globalization. Besides its unique company culture, Acme had seemed US centric. “The only tough part that I saw in transitioning to Acme was getting immersed into the

culture. All the acronyms and I was saying to them I don't even really speak English. It was really the shock of coming into Acme, the culture the acronyms. My friends helped my acclimation to the culture."

As global citizens, these subjects rarely had seen themselves staying with Acme in the United States.

> I had the chance to meet different people and work in different environments. We were looking at companies that would be a target for us to close business so it was very interesting and an environment that I could learn a lot about different sectors. So I loved it. It was really great.
>
> Well, I always wanted an international career. So when I came to Acme in United States, my thing wasn't really Acme United States. I said I'm going to go there, stay for two jobs, and then go to Europe, go to wherever I'm supposed to be. I would say that 80% of my focus was Acme so almost nothing outside. I will always try look back or go back to Spain. 'Acme's' a company where you have a bigger number of opportunities for going wherever you want to go.

There have appeared to be a greater need by these individuals, therefore, mentoring was greatly appreciated:

> One of the things I love about it is the mentoring. It is very big in Acme and that's one of the things that help you move along as you progress in your career. At that time, I did not have a mentor really, not officially, but I would say that my manager was advising all the time. I learned a lot from

him. I've had mentors later on. I had a mentor for a while. It worked at the beginning, I would say, in the end it vanished a bit. But it helped me out. I still talk to him once in a while every two or three months, just chatting sometimes and I ask for things that he always mentor me. I have another official mentor now. I still talk to the other one once in a while. I totally buy into the idea of mentoring but I think the relationships that work best are based on how you click. It needs to be something that just naturally happens. I keep in close contact with a lot of these guys, but I would not call them mentors, and certainly not sponsors. So I need to find another one right now. I would like to have a sponsor, but I don't know if I do. A lot of people I thought could be my sponsors left. So right now, I am not sure.

As with all participants, the commitment had been to career and not to the company, at least initially:

But you know what drives my career is how much I'm learning and how challenging it is. Right now I feel that I have the energy, I'm learning a lot and it is pretty challenging and I don't feel the need for moving. I'm not because I have a prospective career here so as long as I see this light, I know what's going to be my next step. I have no reason to leave. If in any moment I'm going to hear, 'You're not going to be able to do that anymore. And we're not sure.' Then that might be a little bit sad for me because I really want to keep going.

The substantial pull to go back to their homeland and family had presented a challenge to these participants in pursuit of the learning and growth career:

> The only reason why I felt like leaving is my interest in going back to Europe. My kids are growing and we are not sure if we want to stay here. My parents are growing old, too. They have problems like my mom went to the hospital twice. I'm just wondering what we are doing here. It's great. I've learned so much in this country but somehow the plan was to come here for a while and then go back.

The employee identity group had been seen as an extra opportunity to learn and to discuss with others who are expatriates of another country into the United States:

> My involvement in HISPA began because someone asked me about it. I thought it was very interesting. But I think it's a great thing because we can share some perceptions that we have that I would say has to do with being foreigners. I'm not even talking about being Hispanic or any other group, because we have the Asians groups or something. Sometimes what you see is a little bit different and discussing the ideas and even opportunities, it is distinct more or less opportunity in Acme. So I would say that to have more opportunities you should participate. I believe that I have never seen this as a reason to participate. I would say there's much to discuss, ideas and perceptions. I believe it does give an advantage

because just as I struggled a little bit to be where I am today, all the transfers coming from different countries did also, so these people share a little bit and they know how tough, and how hard they had to work to be in the same position that somebody else is that is right here. You have to go through moments that prove you really want things and that you'll really fight for it and you'll do whatever is necessary to be successful. And I think you feel having people around you that had the same issues will help since they understand what type of person you are and they can say that I know somebody that I'm pretty sure will be able to do it. I think it brings great perspective and great networking just to see what people are doing. And it has helped me increase my network tremendously across different businesses and not just Hispanics but everywhere.

There is however, a recognition that something has resulted in less than a significant progress of Hispanic Americans up the ranks. Clearly, one issue for these participants had was the ability to broaden their network:

It is difficult to say whether the networks are leveling the field or putting people ahead. We have a long way to go. I think mid-level people are concerned and are wondering why network people get opportunity and they don't. On the other hand, we only had two Hispanic officers, one retired and one left. So I think we a have long way to go. But I think it is easier for us to start making ties with someone that is like us and then branch out and get Acme to recognize us. The HISPA activity has given

me some mind relaxation. To some extent I think sometimes the American guys are maybe the ones feeling that they are not treated fairly. I guess it's a big deal here.

Since these participants didn't perceive themselves as part of the 'diversity' equation, the Hispanic Americans [HISPA] group had been more of a way to aid their individual career goals. "To me, it's just a way of meeting people, like we go once a year to the summit in New York and a lot of leaders go there. I just take advantage of that and learn and meet people as much as I can. But I don't see myself as diverse just by having been involved."

Yet, others had seen the groups as going beyond the individual and that of one's career:

I think people don't realize the opportunity. The network you can build through the networks. At HISPA you can spend three days with all the leaders of Acme It is definitely helpful to one's career. You can't get that connection elsewhere. I think HISPA levels the playing field. If you look at our senior leaders you realize there is very little diversity. I am hoping this helps bring Hispanics, African Americans etcetera up to the senior levels.

Composite Structural Description

These participants have been foreign born Hispanics that were first generation working in corporate America. As a result their experience may be very different than American born Hispanics who had moved through corporate

America. But there have been only a few American born Hispanics in the professional ranks of Acme.

Nevertheless, or perhaps because of their background, the idea of working in a global, US based company with multiple industries had been a huge draw. “You want to work in manufacturing, transportation, whatever. There are many more businesses than any other company. The whole initial Acme experience was good, and the work and the challenge is what made me want to sign on. I saw a big opportunity and the big size of Acme.”

However, the background of these participants often left them seeking the opportunity to go overseas and Acme had presented those possibilities. “I will always try look back or go back to Spain. Acme’s a company where you have a bigger number of opportunities to wherever you want to go.”

Like other participants, support through mentoring has been important and appreciated. Yet, the finding and maintenance of a mentoring relationship had been very difficult. In particular, the formal mentoring programs had been less helpful, but building a supportive mentoring relationship on your own could be challenging:

> I totally buy into the idea of mentoring, but I think the relationships that work best are based on how you click. It needs to be something that just naturally happens. I keep in close contact with a lot of these guys, but I would not call them mentors, and certainly not sponsors.

The driving force for these participants that had made them stay was the ability to advance through challenging, learning opportunities. What can make them leave is hearing, “You’re not going to be able to do that anymore. And we’re not sure.”

The employee identity network, HISPA, had provided an opportunity for mentoring. The participants had seen this as an ability to share “perceptions that we have that I would say has to do with being foreigners.” Some didn’t see this as providing a leg up, but rather as a chance to have shared a common thread of progress from outside the US to a strong career within a major organization. “And I think you feel having people around you that had the same issues will help since they understand what type of person you are and they can say that I know somebody that I’m pretty sure will be able to do it.” And others did see the chance to equalize opportunity, but also had recognized a perception that outsiders from HISPA and the other networks had concerns. “To some extent I think sometimes the American guys are maybe the ones feeling that they are not treated fairly. I guess it’s a big deal here.”

Asian Pacific Americans

Composite Textural Description

Similarly as with the other participants in this study, it had been the broad range of opportunity in the diverse businesses of Acme and the large amount of training that has been available which most often attracted the Asian Pacific Americans in this study. “It was the mention of the diverse programs and businesses. It was about the training, Six Sigma and the like. Sounded like a

real good place where if you performed you got rewarded. That message was clear to me. The second issue was the choice you had. Career choice was an opportunity to go into different businesses."

Although, the diversity and size of Acme had been the attraction, these participants, like many, did not recognize the breadth and reach of Acme.

> You didn't have to stay in an industrial business. Career growth was how you defined it--the way you wanted. And the company had a pretty big name. I still was not aware of how much Acme was as a big huge organization at that stage and I didn't know what exactly Acme's businesses were. Coming into Acme was a fantastic process. What I enjoy most about work at Acme is the ability to use my skills and the people I met. When I started I realized it was a big umbrella; so I don't want to pass this great opportunity to work with Acme.

Support of others had become key in growing a career:

> The new job at Acme had lots of independence. I definitely had the support of the larger organization; otherwise I wouldn't have made it to where I was. I had a lot of people that I go and speak to and take help. I was in the first role a little less than two years. I was considered successful and I liked the structure of the company. We had a good team. I learned a lot from them.

Despite the assistance of others in one's career, there was often a difficult situation that had to be reconciled with the individual's thoughts and plans for their career:

> My worst situation was one of my managers and his leadership style. I was thinking about leaving because of his negative attitude. A couple of managers I've worked with gave me recommendations. They said I should stay because I knew the system. I stayed because I was having success and I was leading projects. It did two things to me. One, for the first time, it made me sit back and evaluate my career from a business proposal perspective. And on the other side, it gave me opportunities to network and I kept that network up for the next three to four years. And unfortunately three, four, almost all of them are no longer in the company.

Developing mentors and sponsors has been integral and those built on the basis of a personal relationship were considered the best:

> These project leads put me in front of the next level manager, and she was impressed with me. After some consternation, I approached her about mentoring me. It turned out she was eager to help me. She eventually pulled me away from the negative manager into a Black Belt role on her team. At the time being at Corporate and in such a role was much desired role for high potentials. I had another mentor who was in Business Development. This was a completely different relationship because he was far senior, not in my function so advised me on broader

leadership issues, personal growth and development. After this role, I was considering leaving Acme. I was not comfortable with the working environment. In fact, I told my boss that I'm moving. I did not discuss it with my family. It was a purely professional decision, primary based because I just was not getting any support from my boss or the business leader in that job. I reached a plateau almost immediately. Before I did anything stupid, I called up my network. They were pretty aghast and said, 'Don't do it. You know, don't take any hasty decisions. Hold on for some time. Why would you quit Acme because of one person? Don't quit Acme. We'll find you a new job.' So that really helped me because it got me in touch with senior people in the company—they hear your name and you start presenting to them.

The employee identity network had provided a broader opportunity to develop a network of mentors:

While I appreciated the attention, there was not as much of a connection. I was able to move out of the Black Belt role through my APAF (Asian Pacific American Forum) connection. A connection in APAF that I worked with recommended me for a role. He also took the lead in speaking to my manager about the role, and I was hired back into a risk role. This was my first experience with the help of networking, but not the last. In my next role, the APAF played a part again. A contact made through APAF talked to me about a role and approached the hiring manager with my name. I

came into my current role as a result. This proves that in Acme knowing someone connected to the hiring manager is key. I had been looking at positions on the posting system for a few months with no response. I'm a big fan of the mentor program. I learned a lot from my peers. I am non-stop always asking questions. But the mentor program enables people to stick to people that have experience and can give you guidance in dealing with issues and stuff, not just professionally but personally as well. These are the people that can help me grow.

The growth of the Pacific Rim in the economy of the world has created another reason the employee identity network attracted people to participate:

I have a passion for APAF simply because I know the opportunity in that part of the country, that part of the world has for Acme. You decide whether you want to be a part of it. I've been trying to do what I could to sit back and say, 'I didn't want to be a part of APAF,' and continue doing what I do. And I look at the downside. The downside is two things. One, you'll lose the right to express an opinion if you do that. Secondly, a part of it is also being selfish and I'd be lying if I didn't tell you that it was also in my mind when I decided I wanted to be a part of APAF. The biggest thing was I really want to be a part of it, to be a part of the team.

The employee identity network has helped to cement relationships:

> I just want to see my contribution, and Acme is big enough to allow that, but its size is also why I have been active with APAF. I think APAF allows a good safe place to learn. I have found my participation has allowed me to meet a lot of people I would not otherwise be exposed to, and to learn about other roles within the company. My participations in APAF increased because the opportunity to direct and the opportunity to network. When I talked to my boss he sold it well. Being at Summit and seeing the quality of people, the learning there—Agile and the Summit were the key reasons. There was a lot of stuff to miss if I didn't interact with these people.

This network, like HISPA (Hispanic American Association), has helped to build community across the varied Asian cultures:

> I liked it because although we're all Asians we come from different cultures. We're different, like someone is from India, I'm from Vietnam and someone was from China. We talked about how we relate to the American business, learn more about how Americans deal with Asians, how Asians deal with them and try to break those differences. I've gone to meetings. I've gone to a lot of workouts. I belong to that group and it helped me grow up. In addition to the value of networking and mentoring, the employee identity network provided career guidance and assistance with the mores of social behavior in this large organization.

Another person had stated:

> I think a part of me wants to go to this meeting, to learn more. It's to maybe change my mindset, to change my mentality and to learn things like how to do the hand shake with people. That is very important. Career wise, it had some impact on how to deal with people, how to socialize with people and how to network with people. I'm not sure I couldn't get this elsewhere. Maybe I haven't participated in other outside groups where different people attend. I haven't checked into it so I can't say I couldn't get it elsewhere—like with the Women's Network Group. But APAF helps us grow in the business world. That's how I describe it. For me, if I want to succeed I have to know how to deal with people. APAF has given me some guidance since we have people from different cultures and we live in the US. You know we need to understand culture. We need to blend well with other people. And APAF provides me with that skill set. The biggest help is my understanding of diversity—how people learn and how I have to allow my team to grow. I am learning to sell myself through going to APAF. I am a member now, bringing APAF to the people and bringing senior leadership to the people here.

While the participants' lifestyle had changed and had created conflicting needs, they still have been driven by the same things, but often when questioned, they rank them in a different order:

> I was married a few years ago and now I have a little baby at home. It is causing me to reexamine priorities. Now my focus is on a place with quality schools, and a place where she can be comfortable. I think APAF will be helpful in this arena also. Acme is very big, but APAF is small. I can discuss these changing priorities safely and determine how I can move toward a management role but balance my life. There are three things that keep me in the company, and in this order: who I work for, I mean who's my boss and my peer group, what I do in terms of job content, and of course, money. I wouldn't say it doesn't motivate me but that's number three. Number one and number two would be who I work for and what I do. I am not going to say I will be at Acme forever. Nobody is going to believe that, but so far for me it is the opportunity. It is the right opportunity, but if someone else offers it more quickly with the right balance, I would probably say yes.

Ultimately, if the needs are being met for the individual at the right place and time, there had been a recognition that the grass is not always greener on the other side:

> You know over this time, I have been contacted by headhunters, but I am still here because ultimately Acme is a good company to work for, and that's something other companies may not be able to offer. I think it really is all about career path with a place that can really let me contribute big time. This next phase of my career will be interesting though.

Composite Structural Description

The Asian Pacific American participants, like the Hispanic Americans, had been foreign born, first generation workers in corporate America. Coming to Acme had been all about the perceived opportunities in a large organization with an identifiable brand name. "It was the mention of the diverse programs and businesses. It was about the training, Six Sigma and the like."

As with most careers there had been difficult times that make people think of moving on from their role or their company. More often than not it had stemmed from an immediate leader. "My worst situation was one of my managers and his leadership style. I was thinking about leaving because of his negative attitude." When this had occurred, the saving grace was usually the network of mentors and sponsors, if the employee had developed them. "One, for the first time, it made me sit back and evaluate my career from a business proposal perspective. And on the other side, it gave me opportunities to network and I kept that network up for the next three to four years." In the case of the Asian Pacific Americans in the study it had been a combination of individual managers they had and the employee identity network that had provided the guidance through the tough times and kept them in the organization. "While I appreciated the attention, there was not as much of a connection. I was able to move out of the Black Belt role through my APAF (Asian Pacific American Forum) connection."

These employees had recognized both the opportunity inherent in the size of Acme and the pitfalls of its size. They have made it a smaller place by

participating in the employee identity network. “I just want to see my contribution, and Acme is big enough to allow that, but its size is also why I have been active with APAF. I think APAF allows a good safe place to learn.” Another person had said, “I have found my participation has allowed me to meet a lot of people I would not otherwise be exposed to, and to learn about other roles within the company.”

Summary

The composite textural and structural descriptions of the lived experience of African Americans, American White Males, Hispanic Americans and Asian Pacific Americans in a large multinational corporation have been presented here. These travels through the lived experiences of the participants in this study has shown similarities across all the ethnic groups, but also there was certainly some significant differences that had made for a very varied experience. While these composites had recounted different lived experiences some common themes had been evident in these rich stories. These themes have been common threads expressed with frequency or with particularly strong emotion. These themes are explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: EMERGENT THEMES

The themes discussed in this chapter are derived from the textural and structural descriptions of the participants' lived experiences of working in a large global corporation and as previously stated, the themes are based on what emerged from the textural descriptions of the different groups.

The purpose of the current qualitative phenomenological study was to explore in-depth the lived experiences of 16 participants regarding why they stayed at a large multinational corporation beyond the average tenure. Throughout the course of the data analysis five emerging themes are identified. The emerging themes are: (a) belonging, social fit; (b) trusted support; (c) family and community; (d) career opportunity/ critical event; and (e) employee identity network. While there is no particular order in which these themes are presented, the employee identity network theme was the only one specifically sought in this research.

These five concepts are identified as emerging themes because the participants of the study consistently discussed them. At some point during their interview, each participant referenced the idea of belonging, social fit, trusted support, family and community, career advancement/opportunity and an employee identity network. The participants had expressed their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of the reasons for staying through these five emerging themes.

Theme: Belonging: Social Fit

The White American Males all speak of comfort with a community of similarity. The Hispanic Americans and Asian Pacific Americans saw it as sharing and comparing life as a foreigner. An Asian Pacific American captures this feeling best as follows:

> I believe it does give an advantage because just as I struggled a little bit to be where I am today, all the transfers coming from different countries did also, so these people share a little bit and they know how tough, and how hard they had to work to be in the same position that somebody else is that is right here. I liked it because although we're all Asians we come from different cultures. We're different, like someone is from India, I'm from Vietnam and someone was from China. We talked about how we relate to the American business, learn more about how Americans deal with Asians, how Asians deal with them and try to break those differences.

However, the African Americans had a deeper connection seems to go to the psyche and perhaps more family-like connections. This difference may be because the Hispanic Americans and Asian Pacific Americans are of varied countries and some other identity traits are not present such as same language, same color or same culture.

While all people have a need or longing to belong, there appears to be a more common experience of being African American in the United States. All of

the African American subjects are born in the U.S., and had similar life experiences as it relates to country and culture and color is of course a clearer identifier. This commonality comes through as a need to network with those that are similar. “Sometimes you kind of pain for wanting just to be able to interact and just to find out what’s going on in the community?”

> In academic and professional settings, members of socially stigmatized groups are more uncertain of the quality of their social bonds and thus more sensitive to issues of social belonging. We call this state belonging uncertainty, and suggest that it contributes to racial disparities in achievement. (Walton & Cohen, 2007)

The White American Males report a sense of belonging. It seems to manifest itself differently. The connection comes more from having worked together in the same organization and when they were newer employees, having socialized together. “I quickly found out it was a pretty tight knit group of folks who had all been around each other so it took a while to crack.” The sheer difference in numbers from the other group may contribute to the less expansive network.

Theme: Trusted Support as Mentoring

A mentor can be a great sounding board for various issues–from difficulty with a leader or an ethical dilemma, or just advice on how to take on an assignment. The similarities of experience seems to provide a basis for

developing the trust that leads to a meaningful mentoring relationship. Learning is the purpose, process, and product of such mentoring. Trust and support in mentoring are key factors in the tenure of these subjects, and since mentoring and sponsorship can be so key to career development and ultimately how long an employee stays and progresses, therefore, this is not surprising. All the subjects similarly found the development of mentors through a network as particularly important. However, there are nuances in how they used them and how they found them.

Many of the White American Males support the somewhat universal premise that the relationship must come naturally and certainly found it easier than others for an organic connection. “I was pulled into a trusted little circle. If you work well with people they are going to be your promoter, so as they leave and go out and you maintain relationships that’s how you build a network.”

In the African American group, respect and trust are paramount in maintaining the relationship and getting people to stay during tough times:

> I leveraged people, I trusted to ask them more questions as to what were the implications for turning it (sic) down. I learned about style, made progress using my mentors and other supporters to get through the process. One of the things that made it ok was that I did work for one of the people that I really respected.

Sometimes the White American Males recognize that the employee identity groups provides an extra boost. “This is what the internal groups do.

They put on speakers, share what's going on in the industry and you make connections that make it easier for you to pick up the phone and call somebody."

Hispanic Americans like the mentoring but seem to see it as more of networking and not as much as a learning relationship. "I totally buy into the idea of mentoring but I think the relationships that work best are based on how you click…I keep in close contact with a lot of these guys, but I would not call them mentors, and certainly not sponsors." Another person said: "At HISPA you can spend three days with all the leaders of Acme. It is definitely helpful to one's career. You can't get that connection elsewhere."

The Asian Pacific American subjects clearly appreciate the value of learning through a relationship with a mentor. "I had another mentor who was in Business Development. This was a completely different relationship because he was afar senior, not in my function, so advised me on broader leadership issues, personal growth and development."

Theme: Family/Community & Work Balance

A career, as opposed to a job, is long-term commitment to an occupation that has some focus or purpose. Family is important in pursuing a life-long career as it allows us to share our achievements with others. Career provides an outlet for our minds and family and community provides opportunity for our emotions to grow and bond. The working world can be an exciting learning factory that is both financially and psychically rewarding, but family, friends and community can be both meaningful and emotionally fulfilling. So what happens when these two worlds conflict?

All subjects note the change in their behavior over family and community. A white male made it clear when he said, “I became the perfect Acme employee. I got a mortgage and got married. When I was single, I probably would have more easily jumped ship and taken a risk, but now that I had a mortgage and was married I was less willing to take any risks.”

An African American put the struggle in terms of sacrifice; “You can really see some of the hurt even that they experienced because of the sacrifice that you make from your family.”

In the Hispanic American group of subjects there are some interesting dichotomies as a result of the subjects being immigrants. “The only reason why I felt like leaving is my interest in going back to Europe. My kids are growing and we are not sure if we want to stay here. My parents are growing old too.”

The Asian Pacific American subjects did not express the desire to return to the home country, but rather are more similar to the White Male and African Americans with respect to attitude regarding family:

> I was married a few years ago and now I have a little baby at home. It is causing me to reexamine priorities. Now my focus is on a place with quality schools, and a place where she can be comfortable. I think APAF will be helpful in this arena also. Acme is very big, but APAF is small. I can discuss these changing priorities safely and determine how I can move toward a management role but balance my life.

Theme: Career Opportunity/Critical Event

All of the participants spoke of the career opportunity available at Acme as a reason for initially being attracted to the organization and also cite this as the basis for continued commitment to the organization. In all cases, the breadth of Acme's businesses and the depth of their commitment to development is mentioned as principal reasons for coming to and staying with Acme.

The White American Males speak of opportunity from the time the recruiter contacted them. "The recruiter made the job sound very interesting" Another participant said: "The downside of the opportunity was the need to move around to find the right next step…I didn't see a lot of opportunities within the business itself that is the local business…Your career path is going to be pretty tight, unless you're really interested in making a huge move and relocating your family or whatever."

The African American participants of this study also are enamored with the potential for great career movement. As one subject put it, "I'm getting knowledge out of it." As with the other groups, there is a realization that you must take control of your own career in order to take advantage of the depth and breadth of Acme. "You have to be ready to articulate very clearly what your career goals and objectives are."

The Hispanic Americans in the study mention the attraction of a large, diverse business organization within the US as a key attraction from a career perspective. "You want to work in manufacturing, transportation, whatever. There are many more businesses than in any other company." This group also

brought up the contribution that could be made. “The whole initial Acme experience was good, and the work and the challenge is what made me want to sign on. I saw a big opportunity and the big size of Acme.” This sentiment continues from the start of their Acme career into their second and third assignments. “I’m learning a lot and it is pretty challenging and I don’t feel the need for moving…If in any moment I’m going to hear you’re not going to be able to do that anymore, then that might be a little bit sad for me because I really want to keep going.”

The Asian Pacific American participants focus is on advancement. “Sounded like a real good place where if you performed you got rewarded…Career choice was an opportunity to go into different businesses.” They understood 21st century careers and desire to see their contributions used. “What I enjoy most about work at Acme is the ability to use my skills and the people I meet.” The concept of continuing to move forward in skills and to feel the valuation of their work was similar here as it was with other participants. “For the first time, it made me sit back and evaluate my career from a business perspective.”

Despite all the focus on career advancement and commitment to contributing to the organization, all of the participants struggled through a career stall or critical incident that at a minimum created enough consternation for them to consider leaving Acme. Interestingly, this career hiccup or critical incident occurs between the second and fourth year of employment with Acme.

One of the White American Males summed up his issue of being stuck in a role to long:

> I was in the role right around four years and it became rough…I would say two and one half to three years into it, I started saying where's my career path…I didn't feel completely land locked, like I couldn't go anywhere but I didn't see a lot of opportunities within the business itself, that is the local business.

What got him through the trough was the realization of how to navigate the waters of Acme. "It's very relevant that there are people that all of a sudden are in all these different businesses. Having a network certainly helps."

The African American participants ran into similar situations, but some had more egregious matters to deal with. "The new job was just short of disastrous. There was no support and there were no systems." In one situation the manager and the employee were completely at odds. Departure seemed imminent. "To some degree, you stop believing in yourself…The business thinks you can't do anything right and undermines what you think of yourself…It required a strong spiritual background and knowing what the goal is." In these kinds of derailments, the individual's authenticity is challenged and second guessing oneself take you farther down the rabbit hole. "This process changes who you are. Now I am not doing it for approval." But if you can come out the other side with an organization that supports you then leaving is not the right option. "I face it with a different approach because I have support from my

manager, team and business to do a good job…I feel a sense of ownership. I have some say."

The Hispanic American subjects feel constrained when it came to finding role models for the advancement they sought, and figuring out if other Hispanic Americans had developed an international career and were able to return to their homeland. "The only reason why I felt like leaving is my interest in going back to Europe. I'm just wondering what we are doing here." Others suggested the only critical issue would be hearing "you're not going to be able to that anymore." Yet, the shortage of Hispanic Americans in the senior ranks raise doubts about success. "On the one hand, we only had two Hispanic officers…So I think we have a long way to go. The HISPA activity has given me some peace of mind…I just take advantage of that and learn and meet people as much as I can."

The Asian Pacific American subjects had issues similar to everyone else. Every career person hits a wall of some type or it isn't a career. One of the participants ran into a negative manager and gave much thought to leaving. What alters that feeling was her network team. "I just was not getting any support from my boss or the business leader in that job. Before I did anything stupid, I called up my network. They were pretty aghast…'why would you quit because of one person?' It got me in touch of senior people in the company." Ultimately the commitment to moving forward and the perceived value of the organization got them through the difficult times. "I am still here because ultimately Acme is a good company to work for…I think it really is all about career path with a place that can really let me contribute big time."

Theme: Employee Identity Network

This theme was specifically asked about in the study. While the White American Males did not have an employee network directed at them based on their race, they did recognize the benefit of these organizations, “they put on speakers, share what’s going on in the industry and you make the connections that make it easier for you to pick up the phone and call somebody.” In addition, as the majority, they have a natural identity network. The formal and informal networks that have sprung up organically in the organization tend to provide the support systems that make others historically outsiders. “If you work well with people they’re going to become your promoter, so as they leave and go out and you maintain relationships that how I think you build a network.”

The African American Forum (AAF) was the first identity network established at Acme and it has a heritage and connection rooted in the many organizations set up by African Americans throughout United States society when the African American was excluded from the majority organizations (e.g., National Bar Association, National Medical Association). Also Xerox established their version in the 1970’s.

As a result the AAF was the most organized and has both a structure and program that is more elaborate and well known. The African Americans in this study found the AAF beneficial in several ways from recruiting, training and development, and promotion, to mentorship and camaraderie that can counterbalance feelings of isolation. “It helps bridge the gap between that loneliness time and that time of frustration. I’m just saying it’s given me

friendship outside of my regular job." It also has African American leadership that is senior in the Company.

The exposure to the AAF is often prior to onboarding, "I actually came to an AAF event about a year before I came to Acme so that was a tremendous influence on me." But its real value is in the social network, both formal and informal. "I had mixed emotions—the backing of good people, my network, and the leaders of the AAF versus the work." Active participation provides better opportunities for true expansion of the personal network and important information about the Company. "My participation has certainly been a way for me to meet a lot of people. It has enhanced my network, and I think increased my sponsorship."

HISPA seems to have had a different role than the AAF for the individuals in the study. Since they were all recruited from other countries, HISPA provides an opportunity to learn the United States and Acme cultures. "But I think it is a great thing because we can share some perceptions that we have that I would say has to do with being foreigners." HISPA also provides the mentoring like the AAF. In fact it was more appreciated by these Hispanic American participants than any other group in the study, perhaps due to the cultural divide. The other goal within HISPA, as with all the other groups, is an expansion of the individual's network. "And it has helped me increase my network tremendously across different businesses and not just Hispanics, but everywhere." However, one question that was raised is whether HISPA helps to level the playing field. Here, these Hispanic American participants note a recognition that while the

opportunity to expand their network was present, opportunities for significant progress seems out of reach. “I think mid-level people are concerned and are wondering why network people get opportunity and they don’t. On the other hand, we only had two Hispanic officers, one retired and one left.” Yet, some see hope despite the numbers, “I am hoping this helps bring Hispanics, African Americans etcetera up to the senior levels.”

The Asian Pacific American participants in this study are similar to the Hispanic American participants in that they came from diverse countries. Like the others, mentoring and networking are the most significant to them. Mentoring is more easily understood, but many had not had experience in networking. The Asian Pacific Forum (APAF) provides education and the connections. “This was my first experience with the help of networking, but not the last…This proves that in Acme knowing someone connected to the hiring manager is key.”

APAF assists these participants in knowing the right people in what is a large impersonal organization:

> I just want to see my contribution, and Acme is big enough to allow that, but its size is also why I have been active with APAF. I have found my participation has allowed me to meet a lot of people I would not otherwise be exposed to, and to learn about other roles within the company.

There are other reasons these individuals found for participation that is beyond networking to create opportunities for both Acme and the participants in

the South Pacific region. “I have a passion for APAF simply because I know the opportunity in that part of the country, that part of the world has for Acme.”

In addition, the organizational learning through the network is integral to understanding the culture of Acme as well as the opportunities available beyond one’s own division. “Being at Summit and seeing the quality of people, the learning there…There was a lot of stuff to miss if I didn’t interact with these people.”

Summary

This Chapter presents the participants’ descriptions thematically exploring the experience of affective commitment by staying in an organization for an extended period between 5-7 years, where the largest loss of talent occurs. In this description of the structure of these experiences that five themes emerge: (a) belonging, social fit, (b) trusted support, (c) family and community, (d) career opportunity/critical event, and (e) employee identity network. These themes are examined through the prism of affective commitment and how these themes lead to an employee staying.

Table 5.1, Emergent Themes of Participants summarizes the distinctions found in the above referenced themes. While each of the themes came through the voices of each group, there are differences in the characterizations and perceptions. The differences provide the texture and complexity that gives the participants’ experiences and the exploration of these distinctions to allow the development of actions toward exercising affective commitment.

Table 5.1. *Emergent Themes of Participants*

Theme/ Group	Belonging/ Social Fit	Trusted Support	Family & Community	Career Opportunity & Critical Event	Employee Identity Group
White American Males	Community of Similarity	Easy Natural Connection	Economic Reality	Stall-loss of Network	Not Formal - Organic
African Americans	Quality of Social Bonds	Respect Built Trust	Sacrifice Connection	Staying Authentic	Social Isolation
Hispanic Americans	Life as Foreigner	Networking	Return Home	No Role Model-no View of Path	Cultural Bridge
Asian Pacific Americans	Life as Foreigner	Learning	Prioritize	Organizatio n Value	Networked Learning

CHAPTER 6: INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

Opening

The conclusions from this study follow the research questions through the themes found in listening to the recounting of the lived experiences of the participants in a large multinational corporate setting. These participants describe their issues and concerns with this large multinational corporation, but also provide advantages and development opportunities that kept them in the organization. These themes and the resulting conclusions while particular to these participants are based within the current literature and the data of this study and allow us to present implications and recommendations for further research in this area.

The window through which the researcher is interpreting these themes is the Meyer and Allen (1991) theory on organizational commitment. More specifically, the listening is through the prism of their third prong—affective commitment. Other constructs such as the Corporate Executive Board's (2004) engagement, Mitchell et al.'s (2001) job embeddedness, are connected to this commitment theory and result in extended tenure. Some antecedents to this commitment expressed in the themes of this study are well situated within the Social Network theory of Ibarra (1992) and Friedman's (1996) employee identity network construct.

The research question that guided this study is: What is the meaning of the lived experience of professional/managerial employees who stay employed in this corporation for a period between 5-7 years?

The questions that give meaning to the research question are:

1. What elements of affective commitment came out of the experience of these professional/managerial employees?
2. What role does the employee identity network have in the affective commitment of these participants to the organization?
3. What difference is there in the organizational networks of diverse employees as compared to White American Male employees?
4. What choices in the participants experience led to this tenure?

There are three main findings: (a) the development of affective commitment requires a strong reliance on building basic fundamental interrelationships between certain antecedent experiences; (b) the Employee Identity Networks are critical support organizations to building and maintaining affective commitment in a company; and (c) organizational choices at the career critical event are vital. These findings are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Interpretations and Conclusions

Chapter 6 presents the interpretation of the data gathered to answer the research question and its sub questions and explains how the literature may or may not support the conclusions drawn from this study. The implications of

these conclusions are also discussed, as well as suggestions for additional research. Throughout *Acme* is a pseudonym; used as a substitute for the company's name in this research.

Conclusion 1: The Development of Affective Commitment Requires a Strong Reliance on Building Basic Fundamental Interrelationships Between Certain Antecedent Experiences.

In this study the themes that emerged reflect participants' experiences. Those themes existing singularly cannot develop a strong bond between the employee and the company. It is having each of these elements at the appropriate time working in concert that builds commitment over time. That is, an interaction between some or all of these elements creates affective commitment to the organization.

Our theoretical foundation describes attitudinal commitment as "a mind set in which individuals consider the extent to which their own values and goals are congruent with those of the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 26). Meyer and Allen (1997) have shown that "by using realistic job previews, organizations can increase the job satisfaction, (affective) organizational commitment, and job survival of new hires"(p. 26?). In this study there was often an initial contact from a recruiter, but sometimes the initial contact stemmed from a more personal contact, "I actually came to an AAF event about a year before I came to Acme so that was a tremendous influence on me." This is the right beginning, but certainly not enough. This is why so many management practitioners have talked about engagement in the early stages of employment.

There are many examples of the basic needs that lead to affective commitment present in all the experiences of the participants. In this study, all participants speak of their goals in terms of career opportunity and development, and how later a critical event challenged their career and put into question their future career growth and opportunity within Acme. As one participant has indicated, “The new job was just short of disastrous. There was no support and there were no systems.”

However, in these cases, it was the commitment to the organization and the support system of the employee’s network, the mentors and the employee identity networks that held the bonds together despite the tears in the fabric of commitment due to the career incident. Without the mentorship and the prior building of trust there would not be career survival. As one participant has stated after reaching a career issue with a supervisor, “Before I did anything stupid, I called up my network…So that really helped me because it got me in touch with senior people in the company.”

Allen and Meyer (1990a) have found that affective commitment's antecedents were work experiences that encourage comfort in the organization and develop individual competence. Meyer, Irving, and Allen (1998) went even further and have found that work values and experience operate together to influence commitment to the organization. In the study, we have found that initially it is all about the job and the belief in the opportunity available within the organization. As time goes on, and life changes occur, priorities change and it is

a balance between career opportunity and life that must match up with the company for commitment to hold.

The job embeddedness construct of Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez (2001) has suggested non-work issues, work inducements separate from attraction to job or organization, and precipitating life events have impacted the decision to stay. Their model indicates that the dimensions of fit and sacrifice are important. We see this in the theme of *Belonging* and *Social Fit* as described by the participants in this study. It is clear that the concept of diversity is difficult for people to fully embrace. While that may be changing over time with new generations, when people are left to their own devices they work with, live with and socialize with like-minded and like-type individuals. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. once said "it is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning," and but for being thrown together in work situations, people still naturally head to what is comfortable and known. The White American Males speak of comfort with a community that they started working with and with whom they socialized in early career. The Hispanic Americans and Asian Pacific Americans focus on their condition of being a foreigner in the United States and sharing how to succeed. However, the African-Americans appear to need a tighter bond. There appears to be a greater need to belong to a network of people more similar in cultural background (Walton & Cohen, 2007). “Sometimes you kind of pain…to find out what’s going on in the community?”

The study also shows family and community impact, “I became the perfect Acme employee. I got a mortgage and got married.” An African American has put the struggle in terms of sacrifice; “You can really see some of the hurt even that they experienced because of the sacrifice that you make from your family.”

In the Hispanic American group of subjects there are some interesting dichotomies as a result of the subjects being immigrants. “The only reason why I felt like leaving is my interest in going back to Europe. While in the Asian Pacific Group it was often finding the right set of priorities. “Now my focus is on a place with quality schools, and a place where she can be comfortable. I think APAF will be helpful in this arena also.”

It is clear that when fundamental issues of values matchup with Acme needs for human capital, that commitment has grown. It is held together at times of stress when the support systems are in place.

Conclusion 2: The Employee Identity Networks are Critical Support Organizations to Building and Maintaining Affective Commitment in a Company.

The Employee Identity Networks (EINs) provide the opportunity for participants to build a network of individuals and assist in career development and advancement.

The stated purpose of these organizations is to support the company in preparing diverse management and professional employees for productive

careers. Implicit in that purpose is assistance in extending the tenure of these employees (Digh 1997).

For these participants, the initial attraction is this potential for career advancement through the building of a network, particularly one with senior leadership involvement. “It has enhanced my network, and I think increased my sponsorship. The one thing it does is give me a broader cross function and business network that I have not developed outside of Acme.” However, it is generally the other support that keeps them involved in these organizations. It is the opportunity to meet people of a similar community of interest and to have a safe haven to discuss common career pitfalls or a place where the individual can act without a mask and be authentic. This comfort and mentoring is crucial to the development of members’ corporate persona and subsequently to the growth of affective commitment. The development of trust in these relationships and the safe haven of the unwritten rules allows for a sense of belonging not otherwise easily found within the corporation. The combatting of the social isolation (Friedman, 1999) that many minorities feel in a large organization is a true benefit for African Americans in this study and aids in building commitment. While the Hispanic American and Asian Pacific American participants report support in these organizations, it appears to be more about career advancement and networking for that purpose, and not as much about the social support that the African Americans found as an important complement to the career advancement and networking support.

The criticism of EINs is that they are segregating and limiting in the exposure of participants to those with their own community (Ibarra 1992). However, that criticism has missed the point that the EIN participants are from varying divisions, business functions, geographic regions and corporate levels. The diversity of corporate background within the EIN naturally expands the network of the individual and doesn't even take into account the non-EIN connections of others. "It has helped me increase my network tremendously across different businesses and not just Hispanics but everywhere." Employee identity network groups shape strong and weak ties thus leading to what Ibarra (1993) has described as two different types of networking. Ibarra (1993) has defined these types of networks as providing different things—an instrumental network and an expressive network. The instrumental network accesses resources affecting work issues such as the corporate initiative workshops and functional meetings of the EINs in this study and expressive networks, which provide social support, mentoring and other benefits to members of the network. "I relied more on what my mentor was saying, but what the spiritual was saying was not in conflict."

The White American Males appear to have a built in network. While they need the same things that the other participants need, being in the majority generally helps them. However, like all the other participants, failing to work at these things left gaps in their network or in the ability to find mentoring help when needed. Their career paths are not different than any other participant, but a participant in an EIN had a built in ability to maintain a network and to reach

out to mentors when the critical incident in the career caused them to consider leaving the organization. It was the White American Male who more often than other participants spoke of concern of seeking another opportunity without assistance.

This is the real value of the EINs to the participants in this study and is the foundation that when combined with appropriate career advancement shapes affective commitment.

Conclusion 3: Organizational Choices at the Career Critical Event are Vital

Each individual described a career critical event. It can be positive or negative. More often than not, there is some potential derailing incident during one's career. This is where the break in commitment can happen. Holtom et al. (2005, 2006) has described the critical event as a shocker. How the individual reacts at this point is obviously important, but for the purpose of maintaining a good employee in the organization and reinforcing their commitment, the company or its leaders are critically important. In each and every participant's lived experience, there was a critical event that could have caused that employee to leave the company. All of these participants stayed with Acme or in one case returned to Acme because of the reaction of the company through the participants' network of leaders and mentors. So what was it that kept them?

In each case, it was a networked connection that had kept them in the organization when derailment seemed destined to make them move on. In the lived experience of the White American Males, the organic network that is naturally within the organization due to their position as a majority may also have

been a reason for the effect of the critical event. There was a failure to nurture the network and keep in touch with those that had moved on and up because there wasn't a formal organization for the majority, which was the White American Males. This sometimes presents a frustration in not having what other groups have had. A White American Male describes the informal network as less robust: "I think I've dropped my network for whatever reason, and that was a mistake on my part. I think the networking is the easiest way to get a job."

The African American experience was one of slowness in getting the broadening experience needed to be promoted. "You know there are a lot of people that leave within two years and five years. They leave too early, which is what I heard from people that I trusted." Another person said: "This can result in shortening their runway both at Acme and elsewhere. I had mixed emotions—the backing of good people, my network, and the leaders of the affinity group, versus the work."

The Hispanic Americans speak of the lack of role models to show them a career path for people like them, particularly as it related to getting back to their home country. This was clearly one of a juxtaposition of family and community issues with advancement in their career. "I think HISPA levels the playing field. I am hoping this helps bring Hispanics, African Americans etcetera up to the senior levels."

The Asian Pacific American's experience was more notably focuses on continued learning and trying to find opportunities to feel that they were making real contributions. If opportunities did not happen because of a poor manager or

lack of support; the idea of networking for career assistance is viewed as a new approach. This was often their first opportunity to exact a benefit from networking. “For the first time, it made me sit back and evaluate my career from a business proposal perspective…And on the other side, it gave me opportunities to network. This proves that in Acme knowing someone connected to the hiring manager is key. I had been looking at positions on the posting system for a few months with no response.”

So the key element in retaining these employees when there was a critical incident is the action of their network. The EINs provided an opportunity for the network to work, often not only providing the guidance to navigate troubled waters, but also to actually find the next assignment for that individual. While it is obviously not only the EIN that can accomplish these things, if the employee is an active and known participant within the organization they are perhaps going to have a greater recognition of their skills and interests by the senior leaders that are involved. “I just was not getting any support from my boss or the business leader in that job. Before I did anything stupid, I called up my network. They were pretty aghast…’why would you quit because of one person?”

Summary

The following chart (Figure 6.1) summarizes the actions a company must take to fulfill its human capital needs and the steps an employee should consider in advancing their career. If these do not match up at some point, an individual’s career planning and company employment actions could result in a disconnect

between employee and their company. A lack of commitment at these times leads to the separation from the employer, greater turnover and more importantly a loss of talent.

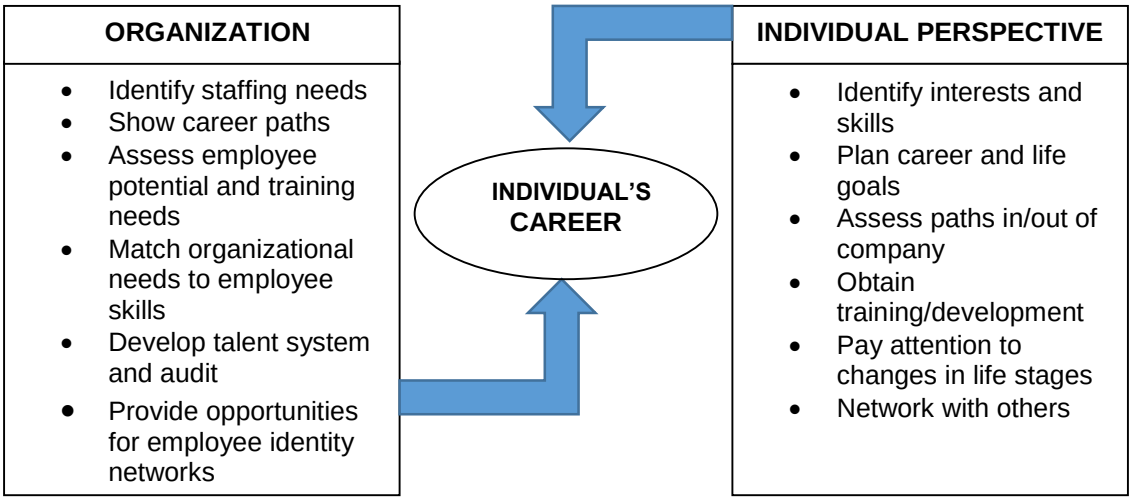

Figure 6.1. Company vs. Individual Career Perception. This figure shows what the organization focuses on for talent recruitment and retention and what the individual must do to foster their career potential.

Contributions of This Study

In this section, I discuss the contributions of this study to: (a) the theory and research on commitment and job embeddedness; (b) the work on employee identity networks; and (c) the knowledge of the role of networks in employees' staying with their organization.

Contribution to Commitment Theory

The study of commitment has been around for quite some time with the theory generally broken into two arenas: those that see it as attitudinal and those that see it as behavioral. The focus of this study is on the Allen and Meyers (1997) theory but limited to only one of the elements, affective commitment.

Meyer and Allen (1997) have shown the construct of organizational commitment as a hybrid where the attitude is developed that leads to the behavior such as staying with an organization. The current study provides insight into the dimension of commitment that can be influenced by the organization—affective commitment. It provides a view of the antecedents to affective commitment and how they play out across racial difference. It supports the model in this study that within a large multinational corporate context, the antecedents of affective commitment can be provided in a way to maintain tenure through the vehicle of an employee identity network. However, it is clear in this specific context that the participants view the employee identity networks provision of certain elements in varied ways. Further, it has shown that multiple antecedents to forming affective commitment are important as a mixture of combined ingredients that lead to commitment and not a one or two exclusive activity as a panacea to instilling that commitment within employees. In addition, the determination in this study that the management of critical events by both the employee and the company is the most significant finding to maintaining commitment and preventing turnover has extended Holtom (2005, 2006) where they had viewed shockers to people as reasons for leaving and specifically called for study of shockers with people that stayed. The critical event or shocker is the point in which the commitment to the company is tested. Whether the critical event is an employment crisis or an outside influence, if the organization does not intervene appropriately, the efforts of building up the commitment through the employee identity network or through other human resource practices will be for naught. Yet, it is clear that the

employee identity network is a crucial vehicle in identifying when such a critical event occurs and what actions might negate the natural departure by the employee. Mentors and senior leaders in the employee identity networks should be able to spot and intervene with options for the individual. “Before I did anything stupid, I called up my network. They were pretty aghast and said, ‘Don’t do it. You know, don’t take any hasty decisions. Hold on for some time. Why would you quit Acme because of one person? Don’t quit Acme. We’ll find you a new job.”

This study, albeit unintentional, also contributes to the organizational commitment research in looking at the effect of the themes in this study as they relate to employees raised in foreign countries who may hold values from their culture and therefore there is a different impact on affective commitment.

Contribution to Employee Identity Networks

The current research extends the understanding of Friedman (1999) in addressing the role of EINs in the struggle against social isolation that many people of color can feel in a large organization. But it does more by indicating that the EINs can aid as a bridge across a cultural divide and in learning across the network. Because the EINs in this study are particular to one company, unlike in Friedman where the participants were involved in a cross industry network of MBAs, it answers Friedman’s (1999) question as to whether the anticipated benefits can come to be with EINs. This study has shown the benefits presumed by Friedman can be accomplished if people participate and the EINs are supported by the larger company organization.

Further, the Friedman and Holtom (2002) study have found a correlation on the effects on intent to stay by network groups. This study presents a clear connection between participation in an EIN and actual staying. In fact, this research supports the idea that these EINs provide much of the antecedents to affective commitment and ultimately to the decision to stay despite a difficult critical career event.

Contributions to Practice

Some implications for employees, particularly those of color, and executives also come from this study. Employees can find information on what is needed beyond meritorious performance to succeed in a company. Additionally, this study has allowed an individual to acknowledge critical events within a career and find guidance on the important elements to survive their particular issue.

Executives and HR professionals can be educated to understand the real value of EINs and mentoring programs. While forced networks are not as beneficial as naturally occurring relationships, providing a vehicle for the organic development of these networks and EINs can lead to a value add for the employees and the company's ability to retain people.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

There were several limitations of this study that will be mentioned in this section. The first limitation pertains to the population of the study. Qualitative data is valuable for its rich description of participant experience, but generalizations must be resisted, and while the current research focuses on

employees between 5-7 years of experience, they were all employed in one company. Even though the goal of determining their lived experience was reached, the circumstances are a limitation. A different company's culture or different industries could yield very different results.

Another limitation is the focus of this study on only three of the EINs in the organization. In this organization, as with many others, there has been a proliferation of EINs for a diverse group of demographic factors, and these experiences may not apply to those demographics. Certainly, there is a question of the value of these organizations, and what is the effectiveness in reaching that value. This is one area of future study.

Additionally, although there are women participants in this study, the researcher did not consider gender as an element in this study. Clearly gender is an element that should be researched as it relates to commitment, as women have become a greater percentage of the corporate managerial and professional ranks and may have different experiences.

The researcher was an African American HR executive in the company in which this study occurred and as a result knew many of the participants; was an original organizer of an employee identity network in this company and despite his bracketing the potential for researcher bias must be acknowledged.

This was a study of employee experiences, and as a reflection may mean alterations of the real experience due to inadequate memory and changes in perceptions of the reasons for actions and feelings.

Additionally, this was a study of participants in a large organization. An employee identity network in a smaller organization may not have the same results as in the large organization. There would be value in determining whether the same dynamics exist in a smaller organization.

Furthermore, since this study focused on only one dimension of the Meyer and Allen (1997) theory of commitment, there would be value in considering all three elements of their commitment theory and employee identity networks as it relates to the lived experience because the relationship of these facets of commitment could mean a difference with the themes developed in the current research.

Summary

This study contributes to the research on commitment and specifically affective commitment, the employee identity networks and the knowledge of how networks contribute to the length of time an employee stays with the organization. From this study further research is warranted on women and affective commitment to a company; the value of other non-ethnic employee identity networks to developing employee commitment and the full spectrum of commitment dimensions (continuance and normative) and their relationship to employee identity networks.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Demographic Information

Name

Age

Highest Education Level

Corporate Sponsored Training and Development

Years with the Company

Position at time of Interview

Position when starting with Company

Direct Hire or Program Hire

Marital Status at time of Interview

Marital Status at time of Hire

Participant in which employee network group

Preliminary Questions

When did you start with the company?

Was this your first professional job out of higher education?

Where did you work before?

Experience Questions

Please try and go back in your recollections to when GE first hired you, and tell me how you were hired?

Prompts: How did you become aware of the company and opportunity?

Were you a program hire or a direct hire?

Tell me how you were feeling during the process?

Prompts: As you came on board, how was the transition? Describe your feelings taking place during the process? What were you thinking about when accepting the position?

What was the position? Why did you accept?

What was the role you were in?

Prompts: What did you like about the role? What did you not like? How long were you in that position? What made you successful or not in the role? Did you get assistance? Describe that help. Did you participate in an employee identity network group? Did that participation help you perform better? Did you find mentoring or sponsorship assistance?

What do you remember next about you experience with the company?

Prompts: What was your next role? Tell me what you were thinking? What effect did it have on your actions? What were the actions?

How was the process of getting your next role?

Prompts: How did it make you feel in terms of looking for, finding and negotiating through the job process—assignment process?

So during any of this time, were you approached about leaving the company?

Prompts: Did you consider leaving? What was going on with you during that time? Were there issues within the company? Was there a problem with your role? Were there concerns from a personal equation? Was it just a better role?

So you considered leaving, what was of interest in the opportunity?

Prompts: Did you think the opportunity outweighed your tenure with this organization? Why was that? What did it provide that was missing with the company and your then role? Was the job for more money? Did you perceive a greater opportunity? Why did you decide to stay with the company?

Did you discuss this opportunity with anyone?

Prompts: Do you have a mentor? Are your mentor (s) male or female? Are they in this company? What level of their organization are they? Did you talk to someone in your family? Did you talk to anyone in the organization? Did you talk to anyone in the employee network group? Was he/she a mentor of yours? What if any effect did it have on your consideration and decision process?

Now on the personal side, are you married?

Prompts: When did you get married? Did that have any effect on your career choices? Does your spouse work? Where? What does your spouse do? What about children? Did you discuss the change in your personal circumstance with anyone in the employee network group? Did it impact your choices?

During your time with the Company, have you participated in an employee identity network (AAF, GEWN, APAF, HISF)?

Prompts: What have you done as a participant? Do you consider yourself a member? What makes you a member?

When did you first become aware of the networks?

Prompts: How were you introduced to them? What was your thinking about them at that time?

Why did you decide to participate?

Prompts: What has the network meant to you? Have you found it helpful in your career? Did it provide anything beneficial that you felt you could not get elsewhere?

Appendix B: Letter to HRM's Re: Volunteer Solicitation

Paul S. Besson

Researcher's contact information appeared here

Date

Dear HRM:

I am an HRM in Equipment Services Headquarters and a graduate student presently working on my dissertation for the doctoral degree in Human and Organizational Studies at The George Washington University. I am writing to you because I am looking for participants in network groups of their own ethnic identity interested in participating in my research study. The focus of my research is on "the experience of staying with the company for at least 5 years, but not yet more than 7 years".

Research participants must participate in their network group, have been with the company for between 5-7 years, and be in a professional career band below Executive Band. Participation in the study is not overly time consuming. It consists of an initial in-person meeting, the completion of a written description for which I will provide direction, and then a follow-up meeting with me for a subsequent interview.

Please be assured that all appropriate measures will be taken to protect the privacy of participants and the confidentiality of the information provided. I will be contacting individuals to ascertain their interest in participation, and I am asking your assistance in making them comfortable with participation should they come to you, and also to allow them time to participate by meeting with me on company time should that be their availability.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at researcher's personal phone number. I will phone you within the next week to follow up on this letter, and answer any questions you may have. I look forward to your support on this.

Yours truly,

Paul

Appendix C: Letter to Prospective Subjects

Paul S. Besson

Researcher's contact information appeared here

Date

Dear Addressee:

I am an HRM in Equipment Services Headquarters and a graduate student presently working on my dissertation for the doctoral degree in Human and Organizational Studies at The George Washington University. I am writing to you because I am looking for participants in network groups of their own ethnic identity interested in participating in my research study. The focus of my research is on "the experience of staying with the company for at least 5 years, but not yet more than 7 years".

You have been identified as an employee with between 5-7 years of service with the company. If you have participated in the (insert name of network), I would be most appreciative of you taking part in my research study.

Participation in the study is not overly time consuming. It consists of an initial in-person meeting, the completion of a written description for which I will provide direction, and then a follow-up meeting with me for a subsequent interview. Please be assured that all appropriate measures will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of the information you provide.

I will be contacting you within the next week to ascertain your interest. I hope that you will give participation in this study consideration. If you have any questions prior to my call, please do not hesitate to call me at [numbers omitted].

Thank you for your consideration in advance.

Yours truly,

Paul

Appendix D: Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

PROJECT TITLE: **Affective Organizational Commitment: A Comparative view of the experience of 5-7 year managerial employees who participated in an employee identity network**

RESEARCHER: Paul Besson,

Researcher's contact information appeared here

OTHER CONTACT: David Schwandt, Ph.D.

Dissertation Chair,
The George Washington University

This research study constitutes partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Human and Organizational Studies at The George Washington University.

Purpose of the research study:

This study is to put a focus on the loss of talented professional and managerial employees by large companies during the early stages of their time with the corporation. This study will be a comparative examination of the lived experiences of these diverse professional and managerial employees that have stayed with a multinational company for a period of between 5-7 years. Participation in this study is voluntary. Should you consent to participate, your role will be to participate in an initial interview, a description of a situation where

you considered leaving the company but did not, and a follow up interview. All information provided by you is confidential. The researcher will delete all identifying information from the data you provide. At the completion of this project, your description, free of all identifying information, may be included in a dissertation and/or other publications.

Right to withdraw

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. There will be no compensation for your participation and no monetary cost to you. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time before the completion of the research project. Withdrawal from participating in this study does not require signatures and it will result in the immediate destruction and/or removal of all the data provided by you to the researcher.

Participation in the study

Your participation will require an initial interview of approximately 45 minutes and a written description of a situation during which you considered leaving the company, but did not. The researcher will provide you directions that will assist you with this task. Subsequent to this description, I will contact your = for an interview to expand and clarify your written description. The meeting is expected to be about 1.5 hours and will be scheduled at your convenience. The location of the meeting will be determined at the time of scheduling, keeping in mind the protection of your rights to privacy and confidentiality. The interviews will be tape-recorded to facilitate accurate transcription of the data.

Confidentiality and Rights to Privacy

All data collected from you is confidential. Your name will not appear in our description, the data analysis, or the dissertation. You will be asked to use pseudonyms at all times in order to protect your confidentiality.

Consent forms, written materials, audio recordings, and all other identifying information will be stored in a locked file cabinet, not on company property, and with access only to the researcher, Paul Besson.

Risks and Benefits

Participation in this research study does not constitute any more than ordinary everyday minimal risks. Your participation will offer you the opportunity to revisit an experience that may potentially heighten your understanding of yourself and your career choices. Ideally, this study will clarify the significance of these types of experiences in developing a long term career with one company.

Consent Statement and Signatures

My signature certifies that I have read the above statements and agree to participate in this research project. I understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for no reason, and without penalty. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date