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Perspectives on sabbaticals and job satisfaction in nonprofit organizations

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Abstract

For mission-driven organizations with limited resources to invest in employee salary and development, retaining top talent is a critical challenge. The monetary toll of turnover is particularly harmful to small organizations, which make up 66.3 percent of the nonprofit sector. To keep staff satisfied and incentivized to stay, nonprofits need to innovate creative new strategies to retain employees. The nonprofit sabbatical, a period of rest and renewal given to reward years of service, is one possible solution to reduce burnout and reward longevity. This exploratory study investigated the benefits and challenges of nonprofit sabbaticals in relation to theories of job satisfaction. To gather perspectives on the sabbatical experience, the researcher conducted cross-industry interviews with prior sabbatical recipients, nonprofit human resource practitioners, and direct service nonprofit staff. The research goal was to deepen general understanding of the sabbatical experience, including conditions for and barriers to success. This study reports the findings, compiles recommendations for the best ways to implement sabbaticals in nonprofit organizations, and examines the implications of sabbatical for various stakeholders. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will help nonprofits to consider how the sabbatical reward might motivate overall job satisfaction for employees in mission-driven roles.

Perspectives on sabbaticals and job satisfaction in nonprofit organizations

In a national economy primarily geared toward profit-generation, nonprofits are distinguished for their ability to keep human and community interest at the center of their work. To maintain the personal touch of the voluntary sector, nonprofits rely on dedicated employees to serve their missions. While nonprofit workers are often willing to sacrifice pay for purpose, they also face a unique set of challenges: "years of tight budgets, increased [scrutiny], demoralized staff members, and disappearing volunteers add up in the hidden costs of burnout and turnover" (Segal, 2011). There can also be an emotional toll to service-driven work that influences personal health and well-being. To remain viable vehicles for service delivery despite limited budgets to invest in employees, nonprofits need to seek out productive new ways to transform their workplace environments and creatively support, grow, and compensate staff.

In 2009, a report released by Third Sector New England and CompassPoint proposed an innovative solution to combat these challenges: nonprofit sabbaticals. By definition, sabbatical leave is a period of rest and renewal provided to employees to reward accrued years of service (McArthur & Adamson, 2007, p. 1). The report framed sabbaticals as one of the most effective ways to prevent the "emotional, creative, and even physical burnout all too common among nonprofit executives" (Linnell and Wolfred, 2009, p. 1). By offering time away, sabbaticals can allow mid-level leaders to step into new roles, developing leadership capacity while providing others a much-needed respite from the daily grind of high-pressure work (Linnell and Wolfred, 2009, p. 1). Yet, nonprofit organizations commonly assume that sabbaticals are out of reach. The daily stresses and demands of limited budgets and staffing make it difficult to envision the possibility of a break, leading to a common refrain: "I could never go to my board with this..." (Linell & Wolfred, 2009, p. 1). As a result, nonprofit trend reports continue to tell a similar story.

The National Council of Nonprofits warns that staff are stretched too thin, leading to a shortage of good leaders (2014); nonprofits lack succession plans to prepare for executive turnover (2015); and nonprofits lag behind in talent development, creating a need to invest in employee growth and support ("Hot Topics," 2017). Most recently, these reports recommend that nonprofit wellness and sustainability needs to expand to people, not just money ("Trends," 2018). According to recent research, 81 percent of nonprofit organizations currently operate without formal retention programs and "76 percent of nonprofits do not plan to create a formal retention strategy in the next year…reflecting a lack of intention to invest in retention" (Nimishakavi, 2017; "Nonprofit Employment Practices," 2016, p. 12). While nonprofit organizations often struggle to justify the human capital investment of supporting people over programs – especially to external stakeholders with clear expectations for the use of donated funds – failure to retain employees can ultimately cost more than finding creative ways to entice top talent to stay. According to Sujansky and Ferri-Reed (2009), "turnover costs can easily range from 50 to 150 percent of an employee's salary" (p. 4). This fiscal strain of rehiring and retraining can be particularly harmful to smaller organizations operating on limited budgets, which comprise 66.3 percent of the nonprofit sector (Frailey, 2017).

The monetary toll of attrition also compounds the situation of changing demographics within the nonprofit landscape. As baby boomers approach retirement, nonprofit scholars advocate for the birth of new leadership focused on the millennial generation (Notter & Grant, 2015, p. 25). Unfortunately, mission-driven organizations struggle to attract younger generations to nonprofit careers, in part due to the reputation of "flat organizational hierarchies and scarce financial resources [to put toward] extrinsic rewards such as salary, benefits, and promotion" (Knapp, Smith & Sprinkle, 2017, p. 653). It is important to acknowledge that flat hierarchy is

perhaps the greater hurdle to attracting millennial talent than a lack of competitive salary. In a *Journal of Business and Psychology* survey conducted by Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons (2010), "millennials rated opportunities for advancement … as the most desirable work-related attribute [followed by] good training and developing new skills … indicating a strong desire for professional growth" (p. 286). However, millennials are not exclusively self-serving. In research literature, one will find equal reference to this age group as both "Generation Me" and "Generation We" – for millennials, the opportunity for public service is also appealing (Ertas, 2015). Indeed, nonprofit employees of all ages are often attracted to the sector for the intrinsic value of meaningful, service-driven work – not for the extrinsic satisfaction of a paycheck. While this remains true for the newest generation of nonprofit leaders, the expected trade-off is a return in leadership development. Thus, to counteract the siphoning of new talent into arenas with arguably more established career ladders, the nonprofit sector must innovate cost-effective strategies to foster intrinsic motivations of service while accommodating the growth and development desires of mission-driven staff. Studies further reveal that "higher [public service mentality] leads to higher job satisfaction and, in turn, lower turnover intentions" (Ertas, 2015). Problem solving requires both consistency and time. If nonprofits are able to develop leaders in a way that keeps top talent for longer, the ultimate benefit is not just to the employee – it is a gain for the population served, as well.

Proposed Solution

Building upon the studies initiated by Third Sector New England and CompassPoint (2009), one of the more compelling solutions available to address to these complexities is also one of the least researched and most overlooked: the use of sabbatical leave as a human resources strategy to reduce turnover, boost job satisfaction, and increase leadership

development. While sabbaticals are most commonly associated with academia (extended absence from teaching to allow time for research), formal leave programs for corporate and nonprofit professionals also exist in limited scope beyond the educational subsector. In 2007, "*Fortune* magazine noted that 25 of the 'Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For' have a sabbatical plan (McArthur & Adamson, 2007). In the nonprofit sector, a number of foundations offer grants for executive-level staff to conduct both learning leaves and traditional time away (Linnell and Wolfred, 2009, p. 2). Research shows that "sending nonprofit leaders on sabbaticals can help them return to their jobs refreshed while at the same time help organizations develop leadership skills among other staff in the executive director's absence" (Bartczak, 2014, para. 7). Supporters of the sabbatical model advocate for its positive impact on recruitment, cross-training, leadership development, capacity building, and work-life balance, all of which help to counteract burnout (Linnell and Wolfred, 2009). Further, the intervention is much more inexpensive than it might sound. According to Tyler (2011), "[human resource] professionals at companies that offer the benefit say it does not cost any extra money; other employees pick up the slack, so the cost is neutral." In nonprofit settings, unpaid sabbaticals can even save organizations money they might normally spend on the recipient's salary; there is also the added possibility of securing external grant funding to support sabbatical experiences, which can generate new income for the organization. So, why do sabbaticals remain so underutilized in the nonprofit world?

While existing studies have proven the extensive benefits of sabbatical to recipients, there is a need for increased education around the sabbatical concept, including its possible structures and practical applications. There is limited research into organizational preparation for sabbatical leave, or reintegration practices of sabbatical recipients upon completion of time away. On a greater scale, current studies seem elusive when it comes to identifying the core traits of

organizational culture that are conducive to making a sabbatical intervention successful – or if there are any common roadblocks preventing sabbatical success. To address these gaps in the literature, the researcher aims to explore different perspectives on the sabbatical experience, conducting a thematic analysis of findings in application to a nonprofit context. The research goal is to deepen general understanding of the sabbatical experience, and consider how this intervention might motivate overall job satisfaction for employees in mission-driven roles.

Background Overview

In order to explore the application of the sabbatical intervention to the nonprofit sector, it is first necessary to examine its historical context, establish a working definition of sabbatical, and provide an overview of the practical and theoretical implications of extended time away for mission-centered organizations. The following sections seek to frame the research objectives for this cross-sector study, and discuss some of the benefits and concerns for nonprofit organizations and employees looking to sabbatical as a way to manage employee satisfaction and turnover.

Historical Context. The etymological root of "sabbatical" traces to ancient Jewish scripture, where the word 'sabbath' described a period of respite and rejuvenation occurring every seventh year: "according to Mosaic law, the land and vineyards were to remain fallow and debtors were to be released" (Carr & Tang, 2005). In modern interpretation, the word appears with most regularity in the context of academe, representing an opportunity for college and university professors to take "a year or half year of absence for study, rest, or travel, given at intervals of originally every 7 years" (Carr & Tang, 2005). The first documented sabbatical program in the United States began with Harvard University in 1880, designed as a recruitment tool to attract desirable faculty to a top institution offering a unique benefit. The popularity of the intervention has grown tremendously since, with approximately "75% of all private and public 2-

and 4-year institutions offering some form of a sabbatical program" (Brazeau & Van Tyle, 2006). While eligibility requirements, leave lengths, and compensation details vary significantly between institutions, the academic sabbatical remains one of the most established and widely-used forms of sabbatical in present day.

Corporate Context. Beyond academia, the concept of sabbaticals did not gain strong foothold until the early 1960's, when industrialization and automation in the steel and aluminum industry began to replace manual tasks and threaten job security for trade workers. In response, companies began to offer 13-week sabbaticals as a method of redistributing available work and providing time off for employees to train and develop skillsets needed to manage new technology (Axel, 1992, p. 11). Thus, at its conceptual core in early industrial America, workplace sabbaticals served as work-sharing and cross-training mechanisms to help employees remain relevant amid changing tides in their industry. This pattern of sabbatical as a response to increased demands on worker innovation – as well as increased need to reduce payroll at slow points of business – continued into the following decades. By the 1970's, workplace sabbaticals evolved to have greater emphasis on promoting corporate values in workplace benefits offerings, especially in regards to social responsibility. Companies like Xerox and Wells Fargo began to support sabbatical leaves for reasons of community service, citing place-based giving as foundational to their organizational culture (Axel, 1992, p. 13). Present day corporate sabbaticals are often paid rewards for years of loyal service – employees with long tenures may even have access to multiple sabbaticals with set intervals between leaves (Axel, 1992, p. 16). While each company has different expectations for how the time is used, the historical evolution of sabbaticals as a means to further service- and organization-oriented goals carries weight in the nonprofit sector, where mission-driven work is central to employee motivation.

Nonprofit Context. It is possible to argue that the nonprofit sector was among the last to adopt the sabbatical method. Despite its historical tie to the church (now institutionalized with 501(c)(3) nonprofit status), ministry sabbaticals only rose in popularity in recent years. Pastoral sabbaticals typically entail "six weeks to six months of paid time off every 7–10 years . . . [for pastors] to explore new ideas, practices, and disciplines as an investment into their church (Bradly, 2017). For nonprofits beyond the church, the creation of the Durfee Foundation's sabbatical program in 1997 informally marked the start of sabbatical support for nonprofit leaders. Since its founding, the Durfee Foundation has "awarded more than 100 sabbaticals to outstanding nonprofit leaders in Los Angeles . . . to travel, reflect or otherwise renew themselves in whatever manner they propose, for a minimum of three consecutive months" ("Sabbatical," n.d.). As evidenced by the Durfee Foundation's goals, nonprofit sabbaticals seem more aligned to the "rest and refresh" model than other forms of the intervention – how time away is used is generally up to the discretion of the employee. Unfortunately, perhaps due to its relative infancy in the arena of extended leave, there are still only about a dozen foundations offering sabbatical funding programs; a very small number considering their large value (Dubb, 2018).

Definitional Delimitations. Exploring the historical background and modern interpretations of the sabbatical experience reveals the inherent variety of the intervention. In turn, there are myriad definitions that can stand as substitutes for the term "workplace sabbatical". These include (but are not limited to): extended leave, personal retreat, learning leave, structured leave, gap year, and career break. In general, these terms refer to workplace absences that range from two weeks up to one full year. While the researcher intends to use these terms interchangeably, it is important to acknowledge that this study will focus on workplace leaves intended to satisfy the following motives: "time for [revitalization], opportunities for

personal and career growth and development . . . a 'benefit' to support staff retention, and a

means of pre-retirement preparation" (Spencer, Clay, Hearne, & James, 2012; Carr & Tang,

2005). This study will not include discussion of legislatively mandated leave programs, medical

absences, parental leaves for childbirth, and other forms of unpaid time away covered under the

U.S. Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA). It deserves brief acknowledgement that

workplace sabbaticals in the United States do not intertwine with these additional forms of leave

to the same degree as in other countries around the world. For example, "until FMLA's passage,

the United States was the only country out of more than 100 studied by the International Labor

Organization whose national government did not require parental leave" (Kramer, 2001, pp. 150-

151). Interestingly, this discrepancy situates American workplace sabbaticals in a relatively

unique context – one that is perhaps more firmly rooted in employee satisfaction and

development than tied to external factors such as family and health care.

Having established definitional and historical context, the sections that follow serve to

outline the core practical and conceptual problems affecting retention and overall job satisfaction

in the nonprofit sector, and to explore the significance of these problems on workforce

sustainability. While the section below focuses on problem factors relevant to the nonprofit

sector, further investigation into the sabbatical solution will appear in the review of the literature.

The Need for Sabbaticals in Nonprofits

In the modern workplace, the need for sabbaticals has reached a critical point. For many

years, organizations relied on internal knowledge kept by Baby Boomers who stayed in roles

longer than expected. However, by the year 2020, changing workforce demographics will lead

millennials to assume leadership roles just as Baby Boomers begin to retire (Notter & Grant,

2015, p. 25). This impending exodus of historical knowledge makes succession planning,

employee development, and the "need to develop strategies for sharing knowledge and experience" even more timely and critical (Pynes, 2013, p. 29). Further, the emotional fatigue of service-driven work in nonprofits – paired with a lack of competitive workplace benefits – leads to greater incidence of burnout and turnover among nonprofit staff. It is important to acknowledge that nonprofit staff often accept roles prone to overextension in a spirit of generosity and service to others – not for reasons of pay. However, it seems that this model of selfless giving is not sustainable when not counteracted by moments of reprieve. According to the 2016 Nonprofit Employment Practices Survey, "turnover rates have generally increased among nonprofits, with the average rate growing from 16 to 19 percent between 2013 and 2015" (McCambridge, 2017). This compares to a turnover rate of 12% in government and 15% in publically owned for-profits ("Human Capital Benchmarking Report," 2017, p. 18). To combat the decline of nonprofit staff wellness and contribute to the long-term viability and health of the sector, nonprofits must begin to consider creative approaches to keep workers satisfied, stable, and supported in nonprofit careers. At the heart of the sabbatical concept is the notion of rest and renewal. With the modern workplace marked by a culture of addition and constant connectedness, it is crucial for organizations to take wellness, development, and support more seriously. As the sections below will detail, failure to counteract the strain of work-life imbalance and find new ways to rejuvenate mind, body, and spirit can lead to serious consequences for individuals, family units, organizations, and communities overall.

Donative labor hypothesis. In nonprofit organizations, the "hardest positions for staff retention are in direct service, which includes some of the lowest-paid positions in an organization" (McCambridge, 2017). While it is tempting to attribute deficiencies in compensation to the prevalence of turnover among direct service staff, to do so would be

overlooking the very nature of high-commitment workplaces. Indeed, nonprofit organizations depend upon mission-driven employees to achieve their goals. To study the correlation between salary and retention, McGinnis, Johnson, & Ng (2016) surveyed 617 individuals using data from the 2011 Young Nonprofit Professionals Network. Their goal was to assess the likelihood of switching out of the nonprofit sector for reasons of compensation. For context, "forty-three percent of the respondents [earned] between $35,000 and $49,999" (p. 290). McGinnis et al. (2016) found

> no difference in sector-switching intentions . . . at various levels of pay . . . suggesting that pay is not a key consideration in nonprofit employment. . . . [The] findings largely corroborate the "donative labor" hypothesis, where employees in the nonprofit sector donate their labor in exchange for intrinsic rewards such as job satisfaction and fulfillment in serving others. (p. 296)

As this study reveals, nonprofit workers are more likely to remain committed to the sector for reasons of compatibility over pay. While it is fair to perceive this notion as a boon to nonprofit workforce sustainability, high-commitment can also take an emotional and physical toll. Burnout can occur when the alignment of employee motivations with shared organizational vision inspires workers to serve the cause – sometimes to the detriment of personal health or well-being.

Compassion fatigue. In helping professions, burnout links to a physiological condition known as "compassion fatigue." By definition, compassion fatigue is "an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper" (Figly & Kurzweg, n.d.). While compassion fatigue is not unique to the nonprofit sector, it is more common among "those who work, paid or

volunteer, in difficult environments . . . such as nursing, first responder jobs, and therapy"

(Katopol, 2015). Therefore, turnover among workers in human services and other direct-care

nonprofits, in particular, might actually have more to do with caring *too* much rather than apathy

toward the organization or poor organizational fit. Without time away to step back, reflect, and

mentally disengage from the day-to-day work of high-commitment organizations, compassion

fatigue threatens to strengthen the trend of increased burnout among nonprofit professionals who

attend to others. Amid this context, a break from the workplace in the form of extended time

away could serve to rejuvenate mind, body and spirit, converting compassion *fatigue* into

compassion *satisfaction* – intrinsic pleasure derived from doing work well (Mathieu, 2007).

      Absenteeism. Another known antecedent to turnover is the concept of absenteeism,

encompassing both physical and mental disengagement from the workplace. According to

Clifton (2017), only one-third of America's 100 million full-time workers are engaged at work:

"16% of employees are actively disengaged—[while] the remaining 51% of employees are not

engaged—they're just *there*." In the nonprofit sector, a contributing factor to absenteeism links to

overworked employees. In a quantitative study comparing factors of absenteeism between public

and non-profit managers, "on average, nonprofit respondents report working more hours per

week than public sector respondents" (Edwards, 2014, p. 299). While nonprofit employees are

oftentimes willing to put in extra hours to serve a mission that aligns with personal values, when

increased labor yields little personal growth or advancement, it can be damaging to the worker's

concept of organization-person fit. The value of career advancement is echoed by Fink (1992)

who further notes that misaligned value sets will not be solved by extrinsic rewards such as

increased pay: "blocked opportunities for career advancement and personal development will not

be offset by increased financial awards" (Fink, 1992, p. 3). Without being able to envision a

future high-impact role within the organization, employees – even those driven by mission over finances – might be more likely to leave.

      Gender Implications. Factors of gender and generation further complicate the notion of desired leadership development. It is important to note that the nonprofit sector yields a heavily female workforce. Yet, despite the fact that "73 percent of nonprofit sector employees are women . . . the vast majority of top nonprofit leadership roles go still go to men" (Alexander, 2017). While the underrepresentation of women in nonprofit leadership is not the focus of this research, the gender disparity does introduce an interesting tension between the desire to lead and the need for time to pursue other personal goals.

      Time for personal pursuits. Women in particular have long been subject to the pressure to "choose between work and family. Either they must conform to get promotions or sidestep their career for the family" (Smith, 2001, p. 81). Although cultural tides are shifting to make this issue more gender-neutral, the call for enhanced work-life balance remains one of the more staple demands of the modern day worker. In response, "many organizations are experimenting with allowing employees time off to prevent burnout and allow additional flexibility in meeting family responsibilities and personal interests" (Smith, 2001, p. 92). While sabbatical does not address the need for day-to-day flexibility, it does offer a condoned time to reconnect, for an extended period, with the family unit (many sabbatical recipients use leave to travel or spend time with their kids). Here, the theory of sabbatical seems to suggest a clear hypothesis: organizational loyalty will increase if the workplace meets and supports the need for time to pursue personal goals and priorities. While recruitment budgets may not be vast at most nonprofit organizations, offering creative benefits like sabbaticals can help nonprofits to challenge perceptions; a nonprofit offering a sabbatical is indicative of an organization that both

values work-life balance, and is also willing to dedicate attention to developing a leadership pipeline from within – a boon to both recruitment and retention.

  Generational Implications. The call for time to pursue personal objectives remains strong among the youngest generation of workers in the nonprofit sector. Ertas (2015) claims that the "millennial generation values career flexibility" (p. 409), not only in terms of promotion, continued learning, and advancement, but also in regards to the economy of time. Unlike GenX and Baby Boomers, who are more willing to work "hard and long for their rewards" (Rikleen, 2014, p. 145), "millennials see a different bottom line. Their currency is time. They seem acutely aware of life's trade-offs, and the one resource they can never have back is the one most precious" (Rikleen, 2014, p. 181). While millennials are willing to give 100 percent effort at work, they seem to expect a quid-pro-quo payback in the form of increased autonomy and faster advancement. Thus, the challenge of nonprofit management is to "design career paths flexible enough and varied enough to accommodate the diversity of interests in the workforce today" (Fink, 1992, p. 131). Sabbaticals can help the cause by providing a concentrated period away for workers to delve into a topic of interest (volunteering, hobbies, crafts, etc.), generating a greater impression of work-life balance. They also help develop new leaders by creating room for those left behind to fill new roles. By investing in a strategy that speaks in the currency of time and growth, nonprofits send a clear message that the pursuit of personal development is supported. Offering sabbaticals can help the nonprofit sector to remain a competitive and attractive workplace despite its limited ability to offer traditional extrinsic rewards. According to Fink (1992), "the investment will pay the organization back . . . in terms of sustained quality of its employees and the levels of performance they deliver (p. 131).

Research Objectives

Through this study, the researcher intends to explore the various models of sabbaticals across sectors, examine the reasons for their use, and synthesize the relevant benefits and concerns of the reward for organizations and employees. The researcher will conduct a qualitative study based on personal interviews with eight individuals from across industries and staff levels – from corporate to religious to educational to nonprofit – to investigate how sabbaticals affect job satisfaction and retention, establishing a framework through which to study sabbatical efficacy, outcomes, and impact in application to the nonprofit sector. This research will seek to answer the following questions:

1.) What are the benefits and challenges of the sabbatical intervention for nonprofits?

2.) How might sabbaticals influence job loyalty and retention in the nonprofit sector?

Understanding that the provision of growth opportunities is key to retention, this study also offers a chance to examine the leadership development implications of extended leave on both recipients and their organizations. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will contribute valuable information on the feasibility and effectiveness of a low-cost intervention that has the potential to attract new talent to the nonprofit sector; create greater job satisfaction and retention among its existing work force; and inform the work of human resources leaders within nonprofit organizations as they prepare for the next generation of leadership.

Projected Challenges. One of the key obstacles to this study relates to size and scope. Recall that 66.3 percent of the nonprofit sector comprise grassroots organizations with annual budgets under $1 million (Frailey, 2017). Indeed, while small nonprofits contribute to the breadth and diversity of the sector, the researcher suspects that size is also a limitation to sabbatical success. In many cases, smaller organizations might only have one or a handful of paid staff, or largely operate on volunteer labor – thus, it is possible that sabbatical leave is not a

viable option for these organizations. Although organizational size is not a key focus of this

paper, the researcher hopes to gain anecdotal evidence over the course of inquiry and analysis to

help address this question and examine which size nonprofits are the most appropriate fits for a

sabbatical intervention.

Research Plan

In the following section, the researcher will establish a groundwork for the study by

conducting a review of previous academic scholarship related to factors of workplace satisfaction

and retention, leisure studies, and sabbaticals. Next, the researcher will conduct a thematic

analysis of personal interview results, discussing methods and findings in relation to known and

hypothesized elements of the sabbatical intervention. Finally, this paper will consider the greater

implications of this research for nonprofit human resource departments, discussing how

nonprofits might use sabbaticals as a recruitment and retention tool to boost overall job

satisfaction among mission-driven, nonprofit staff.

Literature Review

This chapter begins with an investigation into the current literature on job satisfaction, the

theories of leisure and rest, and the importance of work-life balance in supporting workplace

retention. The researcher will then examine previous studies illustrating the structural variety and

resulting impact of the sabbatical intervention strategy, both positive and negative. Over the

course of the review, the discussion will highlight the theoretical and practical link between

creativity and rest, the value of strategic employee recognition, and the role of sabbaticals in

creating organizational cultures capable of fostering collaboration and cross-training, surviving

leadership transitions, and developing leadership from the bottom to the top.

Job Satisfaction

The literature suggests that organizational effectiveness correlates with employee

satisfaction, and that employee creativity and satisfaction suffer when employees do not

experience substantial time away from the workplace. The following sections seek to explore the

layered role of sabbaticals as vehicles for rest and enablers of condoned time and space for both

personal and professional development. In order to explore this connection, it is first necessary to

establish a working definition of job satisfaction and investigate its related theories.

Definitional variation. For many years, employers have equated worker productivity

with worker happiness. However, a review of the literature suggests that the link is not so simple;

what makes people happy and committed at work relies upon a variety of both situational and

psychological elements. Indeed, the concept of job satisfaction is inherently difficult to

synthesize into one standard definition, in part due to its highly personalized nature – satisfaction

will vary from framework to framework, sector to sector, and person to person. Cranny, Smith,

& Stone (1992) acknowledge the subjectivity of job satisfaction, but advocate for the value of

studying its causes and correlations: "practitioners need to know what we can change in the work situation to improve satisfaction and what is immutable" (p. 45). While a "one size fits all" solution is unlikely to exist, managers can make strides toward managing employee turnover by considering what motivates nonprofit workers on a global level, and investigating the role of both emotional and environmental factors in creating workplace happiness.

   Theoretical framework. The psychological tie between happiness and work is often linked to a seminal study by Locke (1976), who defines job satisfaction as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p. 1304). Locke's job satisfaction theory centers on a "want/have" hypothesis, arguing that an employee's level of satisfaction – and conversely, dissatisfaction – is directly proportional to the degree of discrepancy between expectation and reality (the difference between what they want and what they have in the workplace) (Wu & Yao, 2006, p. 487). Phrased differently, employees are more likely to stay if the lived experience at work aligns with the stated values that attracted them to the job in the first place. Locke's theory not only introduces an important reflection on organization-person fit, but its structure of contrasting dualities also sets the foundation for much of the modern literature on workplace happiness. As Cranny, Smith, & Stone (1992) confirm, "satisfaction cannot be judged in absolute terms, but involves comparison or comparisons" (p. 45). In turn, human resource practitioners and job satisfaction theorists have long debated the juxtaposition between internal factors (attitude, personal value sets) and external factors (compensation, physical setting) when it comes to measures of job satisfaction (Saari & Judge, 2004, p. 396). In a nonprofit context, the contrast between internal/external factors frequently appears in the literature under the terminology of intrinsic/extrinsic motivations or rewards.

Intrinsic and extrinsic variables. Rose (2014) defines intrinsic motivation as the

"internal satisfaction the individual [derives] from the work" (p. 29). In contrast, extrinsic

motivation stems from "factors external to the individual such as reward and punishment. Any

form of financial incentive (e.g. bonuses, performance-related pay) is . . . an extrinsic motivator"

(Rose, 2014, p. 29). By its very definition, job satisfaction is more expressly correlated to

intrinsic motivation than it is to extrinsic motivation. Rose (2014) supports this connection by

quoting a 2011 employee survey from PricewaterhouseCoopers, which found that respondents

would "take a pay cut of around 50 percent to do their ideal job; 25 percent would take a pay cut

of 70 percent or more" (p. 32). Although pulled from a corporate framework, this finding

resonates with the donative labor hypothesis established in the introduction; nonprofit workers

tend to enter the sector for reasons of mission and fit over pay. The commonality of passion that

unites mission-driven organizations elevates the concept of individual intrinsic motivation to an

organizational level. Recalling Locke's definition of job satisfaction as a "positive emotional

state," the nonprofit environment offers a forum through which job satisfaction ties to "a deeply

felt desire to have one's life make a difference in the larger scheme of things" (Thomas, 2009, p.

52). Thomas (2009) echoes this sentiment in his identification of four core intrinsic rewards:

meaningfulness, progress, choice, and competence. He further categorizes meaningfulness and

progress under the umbrella of *purpose*: "the degree to which the work . . . is important or

worthy and the degree to which it is actually being accomplished" (p. 49). Here, Locke's

dichotomy of expectations versus reality reappears. To become intrinsically satisfied at work,

employees need to know that their work is both important and effective.

By Locke's logic, nonprofits are logical generators of intrinsic job satisfaction because

they function with a clear sense of purpose and mission – one that seems morally elevated and

selfless in nature. While most nonprofits may not be poised to deliver hefty financial bonuses like their corporate counterparts, they do reward employees with a feeling of fulfilment derived from meaningful service to others. By contrast, in the corporate sector, the pay might be more competitive but the relatively self-serving culture might not feel as motivating to employees. This theory aligns with Borzaga & Tortia's (2006) assertion that "organizations better able to satisfy [extrinsic] motivations may find it more difficult to satisfy intrinsic motivations" (p. 236). It is important to clarify that while most nonprofit employees are willing to sacrifice extrinsic rewards for intrinsic satisfaction, there is also an expectation that their workplace will provide an environment that allows them to do their work *well* (Thomas, 2009). Viewed through the lens of Locke's delicate equation, the presence of a high turnover organization in the nonprofit sector therefore seems indicative of an environment that is somehow failing to deliver a clear sense of purpose (meaningful work done well) that compensates for the tradeoff between extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. To make expectations and reality match and prevent talent exportation for reasons of dissatisfaction, organizations are obligated to create and maintain a culture that supports the types of employees they wish to attract, hire, and keep.

Measures of Job Satisfaction in Nonprofits. The above scenario raises an important reflection on the value of organizational trust, which Cranny, Smith, & Stone (1992) identify as one of the key features of job satisfaction (p. 6). Knapp, Smith, and Sprinkle (2017) further consider job satisfaction in nonprofit employment as a subjective measure of how workers *perceive* the workplace. For Knapp et. al, job satisfaction ties to two core elements: job characteristics, and perception of organizational support. They define the latter as "whether employees believe that their organization values their contributions and cares about their individual well-being" (p. 653). In sum, whether or not an employee feels appreciated.

In their study of job characteristics, Knapp et. al (2017) highlight the five factors most often linked to job satisfaction, including: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback (p. 653). Echoing the idea of job perception, Wu and Yao (2006) place these factors on a sliding scale of personal importance, where the level of satisfaction experienced directly relates to the amount of personal value placed upon each of these characteristics. When individual expectations are unmet, dissatisfaction is likely to exist (p. 487). Interestingly, of those job traits studied, only autonomy had a statistically significant correlation with job satisfaction when applied to a nonprofit context (Knapp et. al, 2017, p. 664). This finding harkens back to Thomas' (2009) identification of the intrinsic motivators of choice and competence: "being able to choose the activities that make sense and . . . performing those activities well" (p. 48). One might hypothesize that the capacity to do purposeful work well matters more to employees than the specific duties tied to the task.

Knapp et. al's (2017) study further reveals that perception of organizational support is a greater overall predictor of job satisfaction than job characteristics, suggesting that full-time nonprofit employees may actually place the *most* personal value on how they are treated (p. 663). This finding is consistent with the research of Kim and Lee (2007), who discovered that in human service nonprofit organizations, "dissatisfaction with working conditions . . . overrode the role of mission attachment in employee retention" (p. 227). Borzaga and Tortia (2006) confirm the value of perceived organizational support, indicating that "when workers are not sufficiently satisfied with . . . process-related aspects, intrinsic motivations lose their strength even when they are fulfilled, becoming unable to influence workers' willingness to stay" (p. 242). The findings of Knapp et. al (2017), Kim & Lee (2007), and Borzaga and Tortia (2006) highlight the importance of creating an environment that emphasizes support for worker needs above all else.

To create such a supportive culture holds potential to strengthen the connection between purpose (the desire to perform meaningful work well) and employee-organization fit (the desire to see personal values reflected in organizational operations), possibly incentivizing employees to stay.

Life satisfaction. Based on a review of the literature, it seems logical to frame sabbatical as a form of soft reward, the human resource term for benefit offerings that affect employee morale and long-term workforce planning (Psomas, Fotis, & Kafetzopoulus, 2014, p. 434). Smith (2001) asserts that these benefits "have increased in importance to help counterbalance the complex needs and wants of the workforce" (p. 74). He further defends the view that a "high retention workplace provides a combination of both hard and soft benefits that [offer] increased flexibility and productivity. Productivity and retention go hand in hand" (Smith, 2001, p. 73). Endorsing this sentiment, recent studies have expanded Locke's definition to focus on the correlation between job satisfaction and *life satisfaction*, examining whether personal happiness outside of work spills over to affect satisfaction on the job, and vice versa. Researchers have identified that 68% of workers in the United States fall into the "spillover group," where there is a reciprocal relationship between work and life contentment – satisfaction on the job leads to satisfaction in other facets of life. These findings suggest that "organizations only have so much control over a person's job satisfaction, because for many people, their job satisfaction is a result, in part, of spillover of their life satisfaction" (Saari & Judge, 2004, p. 399). This study reveals an interesting hypothesis: if organizations can make workers happier in their personal lives, they may find that work satisfaction will improve, as well. Recalling that work-life balance is one of the least frequently offered yet most desired aspects of a workplace culture, it seems reasonable to suggest that efforts to reward workers with autonomy over time would correlate to a positive impact on overall workplace satisfaction and retention. Unfortunately, most organizations do not

seem to acknowledge this link. Using the framework of Locke's want/have dichotomy, the statistics are illuminating. In the *Heldrich Work Trends Survey on American's Attitudes about Work, Employers and the Government*, 87 percent of employees rated flexible workdays and hours among the most highly valued "workplace wants," but only 48 percent of employers actually provide these benefits – a discrepancy factor of almost 40 percent (Smith, 2001, p. 77). In general, it seems that the "provision of flexibility . . . is not keeping pace with the demand. . . . The proportion of people who are overworked still exceeds those who are able to control their schedules" (Kalleberg, 2007 p. 187). While sabbatical does not provide the degree of alleviation that might be obtained from a daily flexible schedule, it stands to reason that greater efforts to balance the ledger and provide condoned opportunities for rest might increase job satisfaction and aid worker productivity overall.

Theories of Rest and Leisure

The need for sabbatical seems to stem from an inherent imbalance between work and life demands. To investigate the role of sabbatical as a possible tool for creating greater personal-professional equilibrium, it is critical to explore what "rest" means in an employment context.

Historical framework. The significance of the "overworked employee" is apparent in a body of literature related to rest and leisure, a field of study rooted in ancient Greek philosophy. In order to understand the relevance of rest to sabbatical experiences, it is worthwhile tracing how the complex relationship between work and leisure has evolved over time. Rojec (2010), a leading scholar in the field, posits that there are two primary historical approaches to the study of leisure: visionary and pragmatic. The visionary approach defines true leisure as an Aristotelian ideal – a pure dedication of time to the observation and contemplation of self-worth. Under the visionary framework, Rojec (2010) claims that "it is a sorry misuse of the term today to connect

leisure with 'time off.' For the latter presupposes work-centered existence . . . which Aristotle

holds to be incompatible with leisure" (p. 92). In other words, leisure is a constant state of

contemplation more central to identity than work; it is a pure and continual recognition of the

value of self-care. In contrast, the pragmatic approach is unsurprisingly rooted in realism,

arguing that, "in the industrial age, to confine leisure to contemplation . . . is foolishly

restrictive" (Rojec, 2010, p. 95). In a pragmatic framework, leisure is an active rather than a

passive concept. It is the reward for work, a boon to the community, the key to physical and

mental wellness – and perhaps most importantly – a citizenship right (Rojec, 2010, p. 2; p. 54).

The transactional view of leisure as a reward for work seems to outweigh the visionary approach

in the modern day workplace. However, in a digital era where constant connectedness leads to

round-the-clock access to work, the once-defined line between rest and labor becomes blurred; it

is not quite so simple to leave work at the office and "unplug" anymore. Blackshaw (2010)

defines this concept as leisure fluidity: "in a de-differentiating world, in which the things we

derive pleasure and happiness from are not fixed, 'work' has become more 'leisure-like' and

'leisure' has become more 'work-like'" (p. 122). While it is possible to view Blackshaw's

assertion as an optimistic sign that the modern worker is finding joy in their work, the converse

characterization of leisure as a chore raises a legitimate concern. Undoubtedly, life in the digital

age seems to add more than it subtracts. Employees expend so much mental and physical energy

into their working life that maintenance of home life becomes a second job in and of itself. The

idea of increased expectations on both fronts clashes with the concept of entitlement to rest as a

citizenship right, leading to an increased call for an ever-elusive concept: work-life balance.

Work-Life Balance

In the introduction to his seminal book, *Rest*, Pang (2016) argues that "we misunderstand the relationship between work and rest. Work and rest are not polar opposites . . . they complement and complete each other. You cannot work well without resting well" (p. 2). He further defines rest by its three core traits: an essential partner to work, an active rather than a passive activity, and . . . a feature that both kindles and sustains creativity" (Pang, 2016, p. 12-15). In order to understand the concept of work-life balance, it is critical to consider the implications of each of these traits.

Work-rest partnership. Like Blackshaw (2010), Pang places the relationship between rest and work on a fluid rather than a binary scale: he warns that when "we think of rest as work's opposite, we take it less seriously and even avoid it. Americans work more and vacation less than almost any other nationality in the world" (Pang, 2016, p. 2). For evidence, look no further than the well-known Spanish siesta. Contrary to common sense, the American mentality seems to be that productivity equates to longer hours and less sleep. However, tracing leisure to its pragmatic roots, the American devaluation of rest is contrary to the development of a healthy society. Rojec (2010) postulates that "non-work activity is held to be inter-laced with principles of fitness to work and responsible citizenship" (p. 2). Further, leisure "was associated with increasing physical health and broadening personal horizons. A mentally alert, physically robust population was identified as a desirable social goal" (p. 87). Thus, from a historical and theoretical standpoint, the modern workplace is overlooking its civic duty when productive work equates to the sacrifice of rest. To grow as a society, mental wellness and physical well-being rely upon respite – to ignore rest is irresponsible and limiting.

Active rest. Instead of viewing rest as an escape from work, Pang encourages the reader to consider rest as an activity that helps individuals to work better. In other words, effective rest

is a learned, developed, and practiced skillset that improves the capacity to execute meaningful

work effectively – it is not an idle waste of hours. This characterization of rest as an active

element in creating a more efficient workplace should appeal to the modern worker. Recalling

the theory of intrinsic motivation, Thomas (2009) would perhaps link this concept to a sense of

accomplishment from the motivator of competence: "being able to . . . [perform] activities well"

(p. 49). Knowing that being effective at ones job is a primary element in feeling fulfilled at work,

the link between these two theories underscores the importance of taking time to practice the art

of relaxation. Interestingly, while Pang places the onus on the worker to play an active part in his

or her own rejuvenation, Rojec also acknowledges the workplace's role in creating space for this

to happen. Rojec (2010) defines work/life balance as equal parts individual acknowledgement

and organizational acceptance: "[worker] cognition of multiple life demands on time and energy

and the acceptance by employers that workers need to juggle responsibilities at home and the

workplace" (p. 54). To place these two elements in balance and meet the needs of the modern

worker, workplace structures must respect the value of rest and create environments conducive to

leisure. Once again, the relationship between perception of organizational support and workplace

satisfaction becomes apparent.

       The impact of rest on creativity. Pang's final trait emphasizes the connection between

rest and creativity, introducing the notion that unplugging from the daily grind of the workplace

– both physically and mentally – frees the cerebral space to enliven new ideas. He explains to the

reader that his awareness of the link between these two concepts occurred only recently:

tellingly, on sabbatical with his wife in Cambridge, England. Pang describes the trip as "an

intense and productive time, yet also oddly unhurried" (Pang, 2016, p. 6), illustrating the concept

of active rest. Pang also emphasizes that utilizing the sabbatical to immerse himself in another

country was conducive to creative development: "being in an environment that is new but not alienating, intellectually stimulating, and different from home helps free the mind to make creative leaps" (Pang, 2016, p. 238). While Pang's discovery offers a convenient tie to the purpose of this paper, his conceptualization of rest as a boon to creativity holds relevance in the greater literature on sabbatical experiences. Indeed, the name of the most widely acclaimed report on sabbaticals in nonprofit organizations is apt: *Creative Disruption: Sabbaticals for Capacity Building & Leadership Development in the Nonprofit Sector* (Linnell and Wolfred, 2009). The following section will explore the connections between rest and job satisfaction and investigate how sabbatical rewards intersect with the human resource concept of strategic employee recognition.

Strategic Employee Recognition

Having analyzed how organizational support and intrinsic motivation link to job retention, it is important to consider existing research on the relationship between reward management systems and the motivations of mission-driven employees.

Long-service rewards. By definition, human resource reward management includes both financial and non-financial benefits designed "to attract, retain, and motivate employees" (Antoni, Baeten, Perkins, Shaw, & Vartiainen, 2017, p. 57). Designing an effective reward system that simultaneously translates organizational values and empowers employees is considerably difficult. However, if done strategically, human resource rewards can pay dividends in regards to employee loyalty and satisfaction. Rewards also have the capacity to send a clear message about organizational values to prospective employees. Rose (2014) cautions that "if you want to see what an organization values, look at what it pays for, not what it says" (p. 19). While Rose supports offering creative incentives to support employees, he also argues that long-service

rewards, in particular, are irrelevant relics of human resources history. He resigns that human

resource practitioners should simply accept the job switching intentions of the new [millennial]

generation, stating that "young people joining the job market would mostly be horrified at the

idea of staying 40 years with the same employer" and that "jobs for life are dead, and have been

for many years (Rose, 2014, p. 19-20). Rose further posits that "long-service rewards are . . . a

throwback to a bygone age" (Rose, 2014, p. 20). Amid this exclusionary framework, what place

does a sabbatical – by definition, a long-service reward to recognize accrued years of service –

have in the modern nonprofit workplace?

While Rose's intentions are logical, the literature disputes his assumptions. In a study of

job loyalty across sectors, Borzaga & Tortia (2006) report that "the majority of workers in

nonprofits . . . express a strong desire to stay with their organizations as long as possible. The

percentage is lower in the case of for-profit enterprises [and] much lower in public organizations

(p. 232). These findings suggest that a strong mission delivers a sense of purpose that satisfies

intrinsic motivation and translates to weaker turnover intentions in the nonprofit sector, disputing

the idea that "jobs for life are dead." Recalling Locke's framework, turnover only occurs when

there is a discord between *expectations* and *reality*. If jobs are not lasting for life despite the

individual's intent to stay, the common denominator seems to be a workplace that is not offering

what they claim – in Rose's terminology, a mismatch between stated values and offered rewards.

Turning to the generational implications of Rose's argument, it is important to

acknowledge that, contrary to popular belief, "54% of Millennials want to stay in the same job

and don't want to job-hop" (Rikleen, 2014, p. 147). This is an important statistic to consider

given that the millennial generation is on the precipice of taking over leadership roles in the

nonprofit sector amid the impending retirement of GenerationX and Baby Boomers (Notter &

Grant, 2015, p. 2-3). Over the years, critics have linked the flightiness of the millennial

generation to a perceived lack of loyalty. However, Rikleen (2014) cites a 2009 survey

conducted by Sibson Consulting, which shows that Human Resources (HR) managers do not see

millennials as millennials see themselves:

> In a study of more than 6,300 job seekers and Human Resources professionals, only 1%
>
> of those in HR saw Millennials as loyal to their employers, and only 11% stated that they
>
> were hard-working. In that same study, 82% of the Millennials described themselves as
>
> loyal and 86% saw themselves as hard-working. (p. 146)

While varying individual definitions of "loyalty" and "hardworking" might skew the discrepancy

between these results, it seems that at the heart of the loyalty debate rests a sharp difference of

opinion. Another report goes on to find that nearly two thirds of HR employers believe there to

be little room in their organizations for millennial advancement ("Millennials in the Salesforce,"

2009, p. 20), revealing a lack of intention to grow the next generation of leadership. The results

of these studies formulaically outline what happens when a surplus of intrinsic ambition and

loyalty meets a dismissive audience offering a lack of career advancement: a logical increase in

turnover ("Millennials in the Salesforce, 2009, p. 20). Thus, it seems that Rose's argument must

reorient itself by pointing inwards to the organization rather than outwards to the worker. In his

own words, there is a "strong connection between reward and learning and development. . . .

[Human Resources] needs to understand . . . the value drivers . . . to ensure that reward supports

them (Rose, 2014, p. 22). If workers value flexibility, seek growth and advancement, and wish to

stay in the nonprofit sector, why would an organization not consider an intervention like

sabbatical with the potential to incentivize all three motivations?

Free rider theory. Organizational reluctance to support growth holds potential ties to an economic theory known as the "free-rider" problem. Kalleberg (2007) explains this dilemma as an organizational fear of talent exportation, where managers are "reluctant to train workers because they are afraid that their newly skilled employees will leave and they will lose the investment they made in training them" (p. 125). The obvious counterpoint to the free-rider theory is that any enhancement of job skills is a benefit to the nonprofit sector at large, regardless of where the skills are applied. In simple terminology, managers strengthen the nonprofit sector when they invest in their employees. Bruce and Blackburn (1992) argue that training is also an intrinsically satisfying, purposeful contribution to the sector, offering a chance for trainers to "feel good about who they are and where they are" by sharing their expertise (p. 141).

Given that the provision of growth opportunities is innately motivating to both trainer and trainee, one apparent way to prevent talent exportation is to create more established cross-training opportunities and leadership development programs within nonprofit organizations. Here, the theory of sabbaticals becomes relevant. In a study of executive-level nonprofit sabbaticals, Linnell and Wolfred (2009) found that when preparing for the upcoming absence of a top leader, "staff members quickly learn new skills and take on new responsibility. As a result, the capacity of the second tier of leadership is enhanced" (p. 2). Their studies have also shown that, upon return from a sabbatical experience, the Executive Director often encourages greater second-tier decision making and delegates more work to middle managers (Linnell and Wolfred, 2009, p. 2). In this example, it is evident that sabbatical structure supports the creation of new opportunities to learn, grow, and develop leadership. While "more work" is a frightful term in any organization, it is important to recognize that, as leaders delegate to a greater degree from the top, skills development trickles down throughout the organization – a factor that allows work

to become more important, purposeful, and fulfilling, thereby satisfying intrinsic motivations and encouraging workers to stay where they feel valued and challenged.

Sabbatical

Rose (2014) argues that human resources rewards serve a threefold purpose: to recruit, retain and motivate (p. 35). It seems fair to assert that at its theoretical core, the concept of sabbatical satisfies these motives. However, sabbaticals sometimes seem stuck in an empirical limbo – critics praise their benefits in the same breath as they condemn them as impractical or unnecessary. Kramer (2001), for example, contends that sabbaticals may "make life less stressful, but it would be unfair to conclude that our ability to function in this or that capacity would be paralyzed without them" (p. 23). He acknowledges that leisure, in the abstract, is a human right – but questions whether sabbaticals are a bonus or an item of unnecessary entitlement. Therefore, to investigate the impact of the sabbatical experience, it is important to evaluate the different forms of sabbatical structure and outline their known outcomes and challenges.

Sabbatical lengths. Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties to holistic sabbatical analysis rests in the inherent variety of structure, length, and eligibility requirements between recipient experiences. In a corporate context, Kramer indicates that it is rare "to find any sabbatical of more than eight weeks. Six weeks seems to be the average, which is a lot shorter than the four- to twelve-month break normally the perquisite of the academic [sabbatical]" (Kramer, 2001, p. 102). While Kramer alludes to increased value in longer-term sabbaticals, the perception of lengthy periods away can be a deterrent to individuals engrained with the American workhorse mentality. Further, it is important to note that shorter-term departures can be just as valuable. Pang (2016) argues that "while we usually think of sabbaticals as long (perhaps prohibitively so),

they don't have to be. . . . A weeklong sabbatical can be restorative when done skillfully, and

even a month-long sabbatical can be life changing" (p. 239). Sabbaticals "don't have to be the

scheduled, well-organized sabbaticals that are a prized feature of academic life" (p. 229).

Interestingly, while the academic sabbatical is widely considered the exemplar of extended leave

experiences, it is also not without critique. One of the more recent challenges to the sustainability

of the sabbatical concept ties to the notion of outcomes accountability, or the need to provide

tangible evidence of sabbatical success. While the researcher will briefly address this concept in

relation to the academic context, it is important to note that the call for measurable outcomes is a

potential obstacle to the sabbatical experience that transcends sectors.

   Outcomes accountability. In recent years, sabbatical recipients at institutions of higher

education have faced increased pressure to prove to stakeholders that sabbaticals constitute a

good return on investment (Mamisheishvili & Miller, 2010, p. 11-12). Unfortunately, despite

reports from recipients that sabbatical improves morale and feelings toward work, "empirical

evidence has offered limited documentation of actual improved measurable performance

indicators such as increased publication [or] improved teaching performance" (Mamisheishvili &

Miller, 2010, p. 12). The call for calculable evidence of sabbatical success is problematic on a

number of levels, perhaps most prominently for its evident clash with the conceptual core of

sabbatical as rest. In Rojec's terms, to place a price tag on the benefits of rest is to charge for a

citizenship right. True to the literature of leisure, sabbaticals are designed to "reflect on a variety

of ideas and concepts, to think broadly about knowledge, ideas, and learning, and to use this time

to rejuvenate a life of the mind" (Mamisheishvili & Miller, 2010, p. 12). Often, the benefits of

sabbatical are therefore intangible due to their connection to intrinsic elements of job satisfaction

like growth in skills and purpose. While these benefits might lead to noticeable improvement in

personal measures of importance, the view is not so clear externally, leading to much skepticism

directed toward the intervention. Of course, life does not function in the realm of theory, and the

call for accountability is unlikely to disappear. For any organization offering sabbaticals, cost is

indeed a primary consideration.

Considerations of cost and size. In a nonprofit context, the obstacle of finance is

particularly clear. Sabbaticals are much less common in nonprofit settings in part due to their

perceived prohibitive price tag for frequently cash-strapped organizations. Therefore, most

existing studies on nonprofit sabbaticals center on extended leaves supported by external grants

from foundations. For example, each year the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation offers five

awardees grants valued at $15,000 to take three months leave: "because they get a stipend, their

agency does not have to pay them while they are out, so their leaving may cost it nothing if it

gets a replacement and actually save it precious cash if it does not." (Kramer, 2001, p. 102)

It is important to note that the model of grant funding is one way that enables the sabbatical

intervention to transcend organizational size. To demonstrate this point, Kramer offers a case

study of a community development agency in North Carolina whose executive director received

a grant for a three-month sabbatical: "while she was away her nine-person staff covered for her

and was able to get the necessary tasks done . . . her assistant director satisfactorily replaced her

while she was out" (Kramer, 2001, p. 104). On an even smaller scale, a one-person organization

with three part-time assistants made sabbatical possible by hiring external help: "three subs were

hired to replace her while she was out. They were paid with her regular salary" (Kramer, 2001, p.

104). These examples serve to dispute the idea that sabbaticals are impractical for smaller

organizations. While grant funding is a widely accepted way to fund sabbatical experiences,

organizations have also found creative methods to make sabbaticals possible using just internal

funding and labor. For further illustration, the case study below will explore an innovative

sabbatical model that draws together the concepts of intrinsic motivation, employee recognition,

and job satisfaction – all without breaking the bank.

      Case study: sabbatical as reward. A carryover from the corporate context, one of the

more established models of sabbatical involves a rotating door structure where each employee is

entitled to sabbatical experience after a fixed waiting period. In this scenario, sabbaticals directly

align with a reward for years of service. One nonprofit grant recipient, inspired by her own

sabbatical experience, enacted this tiered model for her workers in a small, nonprofit human-

services organization. It worked in the following manner: after five years, employees received

one month of leave. After ten years, they were entitled to three months off; "two months to be

employed as they choose and one month to work on a project related to the agency's mission"

(Kramer, 2001, p. 106). Rather than fill the absence with external staffing, the director found that

coworkers were inclined to "pitch in to do the extra work, knowing full well that it [would] soon

be their turn to go" (Kramer, 2001, p. 106). For this reason, sabbatical recipients could also

maintain their normal pay, as the organization did not need to reallocate salary funds toward

hiring temporary labor. This is a particularly compelling model for a number of reasons.

      First, the model incentivizes longevity and retention by setting clear expectations for

when upcoming periods of rest and rejuvenation are expected. In the literature on intrinsic

rewards, this feature connects to the motivating element of work opportunity. Cranny, Smith and

Stone (1992) define opportunity as both "those things that people can presently have if they

choose to (present opportunities) and . . . those things that people expect to have opportunity to

choose someday (future opportunities)" (p. 54). While Thomas (2009) takes a more restrictive

stance, indicating that work enjoyment in the present is more valuable to intrinsic motivation

than the delayed gratification of future rewards (p. 63), it is reasonable to suggest that the ability

to set sights on an upcoming recognition of work well done would inspire intrinsic satisfaction in

an employee.

Another boon to this structure is the established intervals of absence. Studies have

suggested that the planning process is critical to the success of the sabbatical intervention, and

should include both "personal pre-planning for the sabbatical [and] . . . preparing the

organization" (Linnell & Wolfred, 2009, p. 19). With plenty of advanced notice on an upcoming

absence, there is a higher ability to plan for a successful transition. As a result, individuals

preparing for absence are able to train colleagues on their responsibilities, creating a natural

reason to incorporate cross-training into an organization that might otherwise operate in silos.

This feature could be particularly compelling to millennial workers who value growth

opportunities and seek new knowledge as a means to advance their capacity in their careers.

An added bonus of the eligibility requirements in this sabbatical structure is the built-in

element of mission-driven professional development. For nonprofit organizations, time to devote

to the cause relates back to Pang's idea of creative recovery. Previous sabbatical recipients

reported that, "without the constraints of detailed schedules, their sabbaticals provided

opportunities for professional and personal renewal that they could draw on to build their

companies and careers" (Pang, 2016, p. 237). By funneling dedicated time into constructing new

visions for the agency, logic dictates that a renewal of intrinsic motivation (and consequently, job

satisfaction) will result from having time to reflect on mission-driven purpose. Finally, it is

worthwhile noting that this case study involves an agency of only seven people. Once again, "the

benefits of sabbaticals can apply to nearly the entire spectrum of organizations that constitute the

[nonprofit] sector" (Linnell and Wolfred, 2009, p. 9).

Sabbatical impact. The above example provides a compelling illustration of the benefits of using sabbatical as a reward in a nonprofit context. While much of this literature review has hinged upon the concepts of growth, development, and renewal, not all scholars see such a clear connection in their own sabbatical analyses. Mamisheishvili & Miller (2010), for example, argue that reward and development are mutually exclusive: "sabbaticals are used more as a reward for service, performance, participation, or scholarly achievement rather than as a development intervention" (p. 16). While this critique may be applicable in an academic context where work is more isolated versus collaborative in nature, their findings seem to overlook the integrated nature of most nonprofit work beyond the ivy halls. Indeed, perhaps the greatest impact of the sabbatical experience is not on the recipient, but on those left behind.

Succession planning. A number of studies document the impact of sabbatical experiences on subordinate tiers of leadership. In almost all of these cases, the results are resoundingly positive. In their report on executive-level sabbatical outcomes, Linnell and Wolfred (2009) reveal that "50% [of interim leaders] say their experience provided them with a new vision for the organization, and 80% of those have been able to influence the organization to take on all or parts of their new vision" (Linnell & Wolfred, p. 12). In his own study, Pang (2016) further finds that: "for smaller and newer nonprofits, having a few months without the founder also gave the board and staff a chance to develop their own rhythm and style of working [and] . . . to test-drive other roles in an organization" (Pang, 2016, p. 226-227). Recalling that autonomy is the number one work trait that fosters workplace satisfaction, this form of cross-training can yield long-term benefits in regards to employee happiness and retention. Finally, Linnell and Wolfred (2009) explain that sabbaticals can help to define role responsibilities of the executive director, forcing the sharing of internal knowledge that is long overdue for

documentation. In turn, interim leaders can conduct a dry run of these responsibilities and

"decide if the [Executive] job is really what they aspire to" (Linnell & Wolfred, p. 13). By

allowing leadership to test-drive roles at all levels, the sabbatical experience has the ability to

determine the right fit for leadership transitions, fostering a collaborative culture along the way.

     Retention. Overall statistics on the efficacy of the sabbatical intervention in nonprofit

settings reveal compelling results in regards to overall wellness and retention. A 2009 study of

nonprofit sabbaticals found that one third of sabbatical recipients witnessed significant gains in

work-life balance, strength of the family connection, and personal wellness. Three-quarters

formed new visions for their organizations, and 87 percent felt more self-assured at work after

reintegration from their sabbatical experience. In the smallest margin, only 13 percent claimed

that sabbatical prompted a desire to shift careers. (Pang, 2016, p. 226) Considering these

findings, it seems that sabbaticals are worthy of attention and study in the field of nonprofit

literature. While many organizations might be quick to write off sabbaticals as an impractical

experience, it is important to acknowledge that, "in today's workplace, flexibility rules. . . .

Workers will migrate to companies whose benefit packages . . . help them meet the demands of

their life" (Smith, 2001, p. 28). To stay relevant amid the changing landscape of the workforce, it

is necessary for nonprofits to consider strategic programs to satisfy, support, and retain mission-

driven staff. The health of the nonprofit sector depends on it.

Summary

     A review of the literature has established the relevance of intrinsic motivations and

organizational support to nonprofit employee job satisfaction. It has also highlighted the

importance of rest and leisure to the creation of a productive workplace, and identified the

strategic methods through which organizations can use sabbatical rewards to influence

organizational trust, autonomy, leadership development, and retention. In the literature on

sabbaticals, modern research remains limited in its analysis of organizational preparation for

sabbatical leave, as well as reintegration experiences of sabbatical recipients upon completion of

time away. Further, amid many forms and structures, the literature is lacking a cohesive analysis

of the core traits of organizational culture necessary to support the sabbatical experience. Using

Locke's framework of job satisfaction, this research aims to 1.) investigate how nonprofit

organizations can best support both sabbatical recipients and employees filling roles in their

absence, 2.) explore the benefits and challenges of sabbatical for nonprofits, and 3.) deepen the

nonprofit sector's understanding of the impact of sabbaticals on job loyalty and retention. If

successful, the researcher hopes to add knowledge to the literature investigating the human

resources implications of the sabbatical strategy in application to a nonprofit context.

Method and Findings

Method

The purpose of this research project is to deepen understanding of the potential value of

sabbaticals in nonprofit contexts, utilizing personal interviews to gather perspectives on

sabbatical structures, outcomes, and impact. The following section serves to summarize the

research procedure for this study, including the processes of selecting and recruiting the sample,

developing population-specific interview protocols, collecting the data, and conducting a

thematic analysis of the results. In order to answer the core research questions, the principal

investigator conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals who have either 1.) taken a

sabbatical, or 2.) might utilize or support sabbatical rewards in the future. The researcher

intentionally designed the study to include cross-sector perspectives, interviewing both for-profit

and non-profit employees, faculty at nonprofit universities, religious leaders, and nonprofit

human resources professionals. In turn, not all interviewees were previous sabbatical recipients.

If an interviewee did not have a direct sabbatical experience, the researcher asked the subject to

consider the possible application of sabbatical rewards to their work/workplace. To protect the

identities of participants, all data remains de-identified; the researcher assigned subjects

pseudonyms ranging from Participant A through Participant I. All elements of the study

procedure received approval from the University of Richmond's Institutional Review Board

(IRB). Copies of the consent form and interview questions are available in the appendix.

Sample and recruitment. The sample for this study includes consenting male and

female working professionals over the age of 18, employed across a spectrum of organizational

types and titles. While recruitment focused on convenience sampling from the greater Richmond,

Virginia region, interviewees also included subjects located as far west as Nebraska and as far
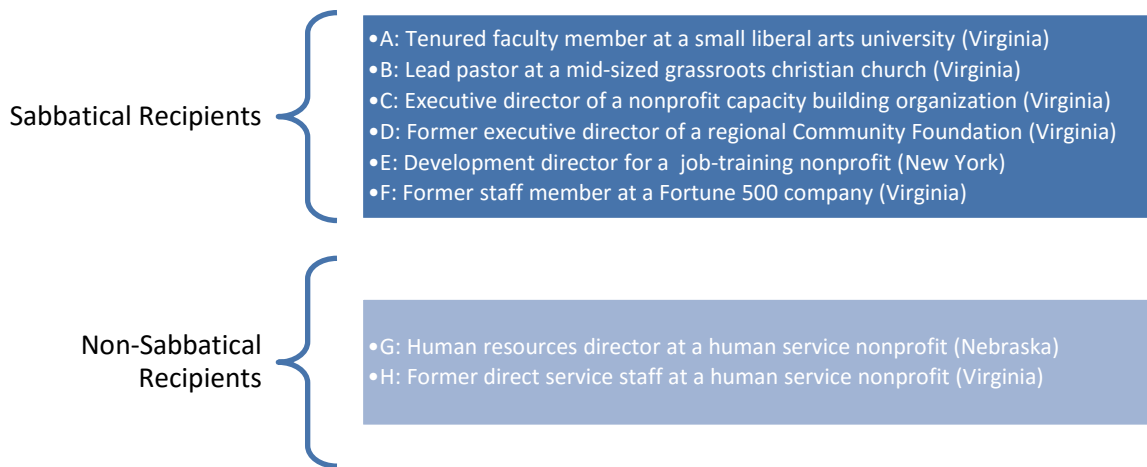
north as New York. All study participants were prior acquaintances of the researcher, or sourced

from personal referrals. In identifying sample prospects, the researcher's primary intention was

to gather perspectives on the sabbatical experience from recipients across corporate, nonprofit,

religious, and academic contexts. However, due to the relative infancy of the concept of

sabbatical as a service reward, the investigator expanded the scope of the data collection to

consider the viewpoint of individuals at organizations where sabbaticals are *not* currently

available. This secondary population outreach included nonprofit human resource professionals

and nonprofit direct-service staff. While the researcher also intended to recruit a tertiary tier of

subjects (colleagues of previous sabbatical recipients and program managers at foundations that

support sabbatical grants for nonprofit leaders), limitations in time and access to these

individuals resulted in the removal of this population from the study design.

  The researcher recruited all participants via individual email requests, which included

both a brief description of the research and a copy of the consent form for review (Appendix A).

Of the 14 prospects identified and contacted, eight agreed to participate in the interview process.

The final sample of prior sabbatical recipients includes one university faculty member, one

pastor, two nonprofit executive directors, one nonprofit development director, and one staff

member of a fortune 500 company. Of those without a prior sabbatical experience, the sample

includes one direct service nonprofit employee and one nonprofit human resource director.

Among the subjects interviewed, the number of years employed at each organization ranged

from seven to 13.5, with the exception of one subject who turned over after one and a half years.

Five of the eight held executive-level or equivalent leadership roles in nonprofit or religious

organizations, two worked in mid-level management (one corporate and one nonprofit), and one

held a tenured role in academia described as a mid-point between assistant and full

professorship. For further details on the population sample, see Figure 1. The researcher

determined that this small sample size provided satisfactory depth of content for the intent of this

exploratory study.

All subjects were required to read and sign the consent form prior to the interview, via

either electronic confirmation or in-person signature. At the beginning of each interview, the

researcher reminded each interviewee that participation was voluntary and open to termination at

their discretion. Data collection proceeded according to this protocol and concluded without any

objection for the selective removal or termination of any content.

Figure 1. Participant Details

Sabbatical Recipients
- A: Tenured faculty member at a small liberal arts university (Virginia)
- B: Lead pastor at a mid-sized grassroots christian church (Virginia)
- C: Executive director of a nonprofit capacity building organization (Virginia)
- D: Former executive director of a regional Community Foundation (Virginia)
- E: Development director for a job-training nonprofit (New York)
- F: Former staff member at a Fortune 500 company (Virginia)

Non-Sabbatical Recipients
- G: Human resources director at a human service nonprofit (Nebraska)
- H: Former direct service staff at a human service nonprofit (Virginia)

Instruments. To assist in data collection, the researcher developed population-specific interview

protocols. The investigator utilized these protocols to gain knowledge on the benefits and

challenges of the sabbatical experience across two core audiences: sabbatical recipients

(Appendix B) and non-recipients (Appendix C).

Question categories. The research instrument grouped the question sets into four

primary question categories: background, sabbatical experience, sabbatical impact

(personal/organizational), and future learning (sabbatical recipients only). The background

category established context for the subject's workplace tenure and personal motivations to stay in their job, prompting respondents to offer observations on the reasons behind turnover at their respective organizations. It also sought to assess organizational preparedness for turnover, and to determine the availability of structures to support job enlargement, career progression, and professional development. The sabbatical experience category encouraged recipients to reflect on eligibility requirements, design, and benefits and challenges of the sabbatical experience; non-recipients imagined what their ideal sabbatical scenario would entail (length, paid/unpaid, etc.) and considered potential benefits or challenges. The sabbatical impact category considered the effect of sabbatical on the workplace, including organizational preparation for sabbatical (e.g. how were workplace responsibilities covered?), impact of sabbatical on elements of cross-training and leadership development, and identification of organizational culture traits that might support sabbaticals. Recipients reflected on reintegration practices and the tie between sabbatical and personal job satisfaction, while non-recipients considered potential obstacles to sabbatical through questions such as, "What are two reasons you might not choose to take sabbatical, if the option were available?" Finally, the future learning category provided an opportunity to share best practices and lessons learned for sabbaticals, on both a personal and organizational level. To obtain further insights, the researcher reserved the right to ask probing questions to create space for examples and elaborations within the parameters of the established question categories.

Procedure. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews that spanned approximately 30 minutes to one hour in length. All interviews occurred in-person at the location of the subjects choosing, over the phone, or via video conferencing software provided by Zoom Video Communications. Prior to the start of the interview, each participant received a reminder that the information would be audio-recorded and transcribed. The principal investigator used the

Voice Recorder & Audio Editor application for iPad (TapMedia Ltd.) to create an audio recording of each interview, supplemented by handwritten field notes. The researcher took reasonable steps to ensure that individual results remained confidential throughout the recording and transcription process**.** All participants received a unique identifier (Participant A through Participant I) in record keeping; transcript notes tied back to this unique identifier instead of the participant's name. This process stripped collected content of identifiable information. Once the transcription process concluded, the researcher deleted the original recordings. The data gathered was analyzed in aggregate using a thematic analysis to identify common themes and modalities.

Limitations. This research project offers a small exploratory study into the challenges, benefits, and implications of the sabbatical reward in application to nonprofit organizations. Future research should expand data collection to include the perspective of colleagues of sabbatical recipients and program managers at foundations that support sabbatical grants, two audiences that seem to be lacking from the literature on sabbatical experiences. Perhaps another study with a larger or more varied sample size would be useful in identifying the perspectives of these important subgroups. Due to time constraints, the researcher had to rely more heavily on convenience sampling than intended. Future research might benefit from a larger sample size of non-recipients of sabbaticals, in particular.

Data Analysis. Interview transcriptions were reviewed in aggregate and coded to reveal six subthemes extracted from the four structural sections of the interview, including the following: sabbatical purpose, sabbatical structure, sabbatical experience, workplace impact, sabbatical outcomes and lessons learned. The researcher further analyzed the overarching implications of these thematic trends through the theoretical framework of job satisfaction. The

details of this comparative analysis will appear in the discussion chapter. The results of the

interview findings will appear in the section below.

Findings

   The data gathered from semi-structured interviews with eight participants produced a

number of findings about the benefits and challenges of the sabbatical experiences in relation to

job satisfaction. In order to better understand how sabbatical might help to alleviate common

reasons for dissatisfaction in places of employment, the researcher sought to determine which

types of interventions the organizations under study were currently using to attract, support, and

retain employees. This led to background questions on workplace motivations and common

reasons for turnover, as well as reflections on recruitment strategies, succession planning

methods, and growth opportunities. Since sabbaticals are a proposed solution to support each of

these elements, this needs-assessment will appear under the subtheme of "purpose."

   Purpose. The purpose subtheme serves to determine how sabbaticals might compliment

personal motivations for work, address obstacles to retention, and foster elements known to

increase overall job satisfaction.

   Motivation. According to most interviewees with a nonprofit background, the root

motivation for work stemmed from some combination of strengthening the community, making a

difference in people's lives, and helping others to make sense of the world around them. One

subject claimed that the nonprofit setting "was more about the people coming first…not just the

clients, but the employees too." Another argued that nonprofits are less about the bottom line and

more about witnessing the successes of the population served. In contrast, job motivation for the

corporate participant tied to a factor of scope and scale; with more people and resources, the

impact of work felt greater. A number of interviewees worked in corporate settings before

switching to the nonprofit sector, citing a greater degree of enjoyment, happiness, or sense of impact derived from their nonprofit roles. A benefit of sabbatical is allowing individuals to feel rested and renewed in their commitment to the mission of their organization, reminding them of their motivations for entering the nonprofit sector in the first place.

Turnover. When asked for observed reasons behind employee attrition, a number of ideas rose to the surface. The top two causes of turnover include the availability of better opportunities elsewhere, and a general frustration with the lack of career progression – a problem compounded by a lack of *expedience*. A number of participants cited that "while opportunities for growth exists, they are slow and a long time coming" and "they are not always clearly articulated." The lack of transparent career ladders is particularly frustrating for millennials who are "impatient" and "want to move up faster." Most subjects agreed that it takes more time to advance in smaller organizations where niche roles often lead to a "department of one" structure. Consequently, employees must wait for someone to leave in order to move up or pivot jobs. One participant highlighted the irony of this imbalance: "we're intentional about growth and career pathways for the population we serve, but not so much for our own staff." For employees seeking upward mobility, turnover most often occurs around the year and a half or two-year mark. For some, this is due to natural life transitions (graduate school, marriage, and children). For others, attrition occurs because they find a "step-up" job offering advancement potential that their previous organization could not deliver in their desired timeline.

Salary was among the least mentioned causes of turnover. One participant observed that, "people tend to move to the for-profit sector where they can earn significantly more money." However, most participants did not mention sector-switching intentions in relation to pay. Rather, other causes for turnover related to misaligned values/poor organizational fit, high stress,

understaffed settings, poor relationships with direct supervisors or colleagues, and a general lack

of appreciation. Echoing the theory of intrinsic job motivation, one subject confirmed the link

between organizational support and workplace effectiveness: "not feeling like you were

appreciated or supported made it really difficult to do your job the best you could." It is

worthwhile noting that this same participant left their organization after just one and a half years.

Sabbaticals expedite growth opportunities by delivering frequent opportunities for job

enlargement and expansion across the organization; proper periods of rest allow workers to be

more engaged and effective at their job. Sabbaticals therefore seem to both signal that the

organization cares to support employee needs for rest while providing opportunities to grow

positions, breaking down silos and supporting cross-training across organizational levels.

Satisfaction. The theme of appreciation resonated in the question set on elements that

might improve overall job satisfaction. In addition to a desire for growth and development,

interviewees indicated frustration with top-down structures that left little room for input from all

levels of the organization in regards to decision-making. A number of subjects referenced recent

periods of organizational expansion, which led to natural degrees of transition in job designs and

reporting lines. For scaling organizations, transitions made it difficult to create consistency,

leading to dissatisfaction and departure for some employees. In academia, lack of consistency

created dissatisfaction in a slightly different way. According to one participant, the self-serving

"jump around" culture of university administrators can interrupt progress in solving large-scale

social problems (e.g. treatment of sexual assault on university campuses). The interviewee

claims: "you've got to be in one place for years to make change, but the incentive system is such

that you parachute in, do your change, then leave after the fourth or fifth year." For this

participant, executive-level transitions interrupt the creation of sustainable change. Finally, in

larger organizations – both nonprofit and corporate – there was a general sense of being

replaceable. Inconsistency in reward policies (e.g. pay, time off) applied across these

organizations led to dissatisfaction for employees. A benefit of sabbatical is reducing the sense

of replaceability, supporting the notion that successful change requires longevity and consistent

commitment – it incentivizes longevity by rewarding those who stay to see the change through.

　　　*Recruitment challenges***.** The most frequently cited challenge to recruiting new

employees is finding the right fit. Obstacles to this process include time, volume, and ineffective

search practices. In a short amount of time and with limited exposure to the candidate, it is

challenging to "find the right fit in terms of culture and overall vision." This is especially true of

organizations that have constituents to consider beyond the hiring committee and immediate

workplace (students, congregations, donors). The dysfunction of search processes can also pose a

problem of governance: "just because a candidate interviews well doesn't meant they are a good

administrator." One participant described hiring replacements as a "mad dash to get a warm

body." However, most interviewees pointed to careful thought and consideration put into who

should fill open roles; in the corporate setting, the hiring process can take as long as 12 weeks. In

the academic setting, departments receive up to 400 applicants for each job offer. Amid this

challenge of volume and hyper-competition, it seems that "no one knows the correct formula to

use to get the correct fit." Better job screening practices would help organizations to continue to

attract the right talent. Since many nonprofit jobs also require educational or experience

credentials that would deliver much higher pay in other sectors, strong benefits packages are

important tools to aid recruitment and incentivize retention. Finally, a strong mission can be a

boon to recruiting. As one subject indicated, "we have a strong, founder-led mission, so we don't

struggle with recruiting talent." Nonprofits should look to these elements to improve recruitment

efficacy. Sabbaticals are a creative benefit that might serve as a compelling recruitment tool to

help nonprofits attract – and ultimately to keep – the right employee fit.

  ***Career ladders and plateaus*.** In younger and smaller nonprofits, many human resource

practices develop ad hoc due to the overall age, size, and sophistication of the organization. The

need to establish more clearly defined career ladders is becoming increasingly apparent. Of the

eight participants interviewed, six could articulate at least a rough structure of career progression

or promotion. A number of interviewees described a system where employees are eligible to add

"senior" to titles after a fixed number of years (typically two to three) as a means of internal

promotion. Other organizations had more defined role progressions, particularly in the corporate,

religious, and academic contexts. However, even in the more defined settings, employees reach a

point of plateau. Despite actively trying to promote from within, internal candidates can only

advance so far unless someone leaves and a job becomes available. Nonprofit respondents

attribute this lack of internal progression to small organizational size; unless the organization

experiences a growth spurt, there are limited new roles available. Others intentionally look to fill

positions externally when niche roles require credentials, certifications, or skill sets beyond the

scope of what internal candidates are cross-trained to possess. In academia, the requirements for

promotion become nebulous after reaching tenure: "it becomes less about meritocracy and more

about making friends." Even in corporate settings with professional career counselors, move-up

tracks, and teams dedicated to talent management, the plateau still occurs. In this setting, the lack

of willingness to wait for internal promotion seems self-imposed: "it's not a lack of structure; it's

a lack of expedience." These findings beg the question of whether structure or timeframe is more

important when it comes to helping employees feel like they are developing in their roles.

Only two respondents indicated that formal promotion plans were absent from their organizations. In one case, the design was intentional; automatic title increases based solely on fixed years of service seemed to cheapen the value of seniority. In the other case, internal searches were infrequent and bi-annual performance evaluations were not used to identify top talent when turnover took place and step-up roles became available. Further, opportunities for professional development were repetitive and static: "there was never a *moving* goal. It was always very geared toward 'here's what will help you in your current role.'" It is important to note that these described deficiencies were a relative anomaly among those interviewed. Most organizations seemed attuned to the need to provide growth opportunities whenever possible. Sabbatical is one possible way to create more established cross-training opportunities that can help to break down plateaus and offer skills development that opens room for advancement. However, one could also argue that sabbaticals run the risk of exaggerating the existing sense of frustration with the timeline of promotion; if growth occurs more consistently but is never paired with a formal "step up" role, employees might begin to look elsewhere.

Professional development. In order to assess existing support structures in place to encourage employee growth, the researcher asked a series of questions related to the availability of non-financial incentives and professional development. With the exception of the respondent above, all subjects indicated a strong organizational focus on leadership and professional development. A number of participants identified "stretch opportunities" where supervisors gave top performers chances to run team meetings or step into new roles during times of need (e.g. maternity leave, vacation). One respondent pointed to innovative practices including mentorship pairing for continual training and coaching; annual updates of job descriptions; and a monthly program that brings colleagues together to identify real world challenges and facilitate peer-to-

peer problem solving. Another referenced the introduction of new technologies into workplace

operations, which both expanded technical skillsets and increased the efficiency of daily work.

Others mentioned traditional modes of professional development such as conferences and

workshops. In general, most organizations "put a lot of effort into keeping jobs interesting."

       The link between professional development and career progression remained largely

unclear. The one exception was the pastoral setting, where professional development tied directly

to career progression: the governing board was responsible for "assessing giftedness and whether

or not professional progress happens." In academia, professional development seemed largely

skewed toward supporting faculty instead of staff, creating an imbalance in the distribution of

growth resources between roles in the same organization. As a result, growth opportunities

actually served as a source of dissatisfaction for some employees. This finding leads the

researcher to believe that development opportunities must be offered evenly across the

organization. While formal career ladders might be slow to catch up, it seems logical to assert

that equal delivery of job enlargement opportunities can help employees to feel more satisfied

and engaged in their roles, leading to greater satisfaction and higher productivity overall.

       Sabbatical structure. The conversation on equal incentive distribution bears weight in

the sabbatical structure subtheme, which asked recipients and non-recipients to reflect on the

practical parameters of the sabbatical reward. The sections below detail personal goals and

motivations for the sabbatical experience, as well as organizational expectations that went into

making sabbatical a mutually agreeable experience, from eligibility requirements and length to

realistic expectations for pay. Considerations of core benefits and challenges that resulted from

these structures will appear in the upcoming subtheme on sabbatical experience.

Eligibility. Of those interviewed, six respondents took sabbatical. Five indicated that the sabbatical was self-started or granted upon ask – only one had a formal policy in place before the experience, and only one created a formal policy upon return. While each scenario varied, most respondents took sabbatical five to nine years after starting employment. Only one sabbatical structure required a one-year commitment to the organization upon completion of the experience. One respondent cited their Executive Director's active opposition to a required tenure, believing it unhealthy for an organization to have someone stay out of obligation if their post-sabbatical path calls them elsewhere. Two respondents applied for external sabbatical grant funding as a condition of eligibility; neither were successful in obtaining funds, but both found the process beneficial in regards to thinking through sabbatical goals and expectations. Only one subject agreed to return to work periodically and stay consistently connected via email during the sabbatical experience – most subjects committed to being "unplugged" for the majority of their time away, excluding a small number of pre-agreed upon exceptions.

Motivations. The top motivation for sabbatical was travel, followed closely by rest and renewal. Almost all participants agreed that they wanted the experience to be a "distinct break from work." While none admitted to feeling completely burnt out before sabbatical, multiple respondents referred to the sabbatical as a preventative measure: "not a sign of a problem; a proactive step to prevent burnout and foster vitality and health." Another subject said that the priority of the year was self-care. Other motivations included time with children/grandchildren; research; pre-retirement planning; a chance to change gears; an extended honeymoon; and an opportunity to explore a field of interest through volunteerism. Most subjects indicated a "now or never" mentality, and a sense of subtle urgency in taking the leap to secure extended time away.

One respondent, a direct-service staff member at an afterschool program for children, framed this sense of urgency as a factor critical to the prevention of disengagement:

> Working with kids, you can see the impact of fatigue. You see it in everyone, but especially in people who have been there for years and years. They don't care like they used to. The kids irritate them, and they are no longer as nice, sweet, or loving [to them]. But working with children, those are things that kids need. I really feel like having an opportunity to take care of yourself is critical. I think being able to take even a month off would give so much more perspective. It would make people better at their job.

Echoing the notion of sabbatical as an opportunity for self-care, this insightful reflection recalls the importance of rest and renewal to both the employee, and to the population served.

Length. The average sabbatical length was 3 months (four respondents), and the longest sabbatical was one year (two respondents). The former seemed to be the agreed upon ideal. One subject, who did not have a sabbatical, speculated those three months would offer: "a lot of time to do something, but not so long that your organization would learn to work without you." Interestingly, many sabbatical recipients cited this very notion of an organization being able to withstand absence as a benefit of the experience, and a sign of organizational health (a concept revisited in sections to come). Others confirmed that three months is an appropriate amount of time to disconnect: "I've heard of other people who have done three or six week sabbaticals and I don't think that's enough time." One subject stated that one month or shorter would simply feel like an extended vacation: "it has to be long enough so that you're really gone. I would have been checking in on people in the last week if I did [one month]." Another intentionally turned town the opportunity for a three month unpaid sabbatical with the guarantee of a job upon return, wanting the experience to be longer – the length felt limiting, as did the expectation to return.

However, after leaving the organization and taking an eight-month sabbatical, this perception changed: "now that I'm in the job search, I think the ideal is three months; I'd be open to going back to the same organization." In summation, most participants agreed that any shorter than three months would not be enough time to reap the benefits of rest and rejuvenation. As one respondent indicated, while short-term breaks are nice, "checking out and going overseas was what allowed my brain to rest." Only one subject indicated that two weeks would be the maximum length of time they could envision staying away; this respondent did not work at an organization that offers sabbaticals.

Policy equity. In regards to structure, interviewees disagreed on the most appropriate level of staff to receive a sabbatical. Some saw executive level sabbaticals as the most appropriate, citing the ease and advantage of giving mid-level employees the chance to step-up and fill the role. One subject felt that mid-level management was most in need of a break, as they are both "behind the scenes and on the ground every day; they are in the middle of both." The resounding opinion, however, was that sabbaticals should be available to any full-time staff member, used as "a reward for loyalty, no matter where they are in the organizational chart." Most cited interpersonal tension as the reason for equity; in smaller organizations, singling out a select few to reward would feel awkward and exclusive. One respondent received negative feedback from a donor when pitching the idea of an executive sabbatical; this constituent base felt it was more in line with the culture of the organization to have sabbatical available to all. Intriguing to the researcher was the frequent comparison of sabbatical to maternity leave, and the feelings of resentment sometimes harbored by childless employees who continually absorb work without a "break" (loosely defined) of their own. While sabbatical would be additive to and not a

replacement of existing FMLA leaves, all seemed to feel that sabbatical offered a chance to even

the field and give everyone "their turn" to be rewarded for loyalty.

> *Fiscal creativity*. Across the interviews, the theme of fiscal creativity to fund sabbatical

experiences became apparent. Half of the sabbatical recipients were paid, and half were unpaid.

A number of recipients paired sabbatical with vacation to extend time away beyond what their

organization could fund. One non-recipient imagined a scenario where the organization could

afford two weeks, but permitted the experience to be combinable with time-off to cobble

together a total experience of one month away. Others sought external grant funding to

supplement organizational reserves earmarked for sabbatical; in academia, the sabbatical policy

rewarded these efforts by upgrading the experience from six months at full pay to one year at 80

percent salary. This participant further pointed out the cost savings to the university, as the

adjunct professor hired as a replacement cost much less than their own salary. Multiple

respondents echoed the lack of fiscal impact on the agency for unpaid sabbaticals; hiring part-

time replacement staff was often cheaper than paying the full salary of those on sabbatical. Some

recipients were fortunate to receive full pay with benefits; one organization even gave bonuses to

the two individuals who co-led in their absence. The overarching recommendation between these

experiences was for organizations to build sabbaticals into the budget and seek board approval to

fundraise for the cause – if not for the recipient, than to fund or reward the interim staff (internal

or external) taking on the vacated role.

> **Sabbatical Experience.** The following section identifies key ideas related to the benefits

and challenges of the sabbatical experience. This subtheme examines both personal revelations

prompted by sabbatical, as well as notes how these personal discoveries infused into the

professional setting. While some subjects reference organizational impact in their reflections,

findings on planning and reintegration processes primarily appear in the upcoming subtheme on workplace impact.

   Benefits. For all subjects who took sabbatical, the viewpoint was resoundingly positive. Participants cited benefits on both a personal and an organizational level. Perhaps the most frequently mentioned benefit was the idea of self-care and time for true rest and rejuvenation. Disconnecting entirely from work allowed one respondent to rediscover a love for family; another adopted the practice of daily meditation. The latter now reports that practicing "self-care led to improvements in how I teach. It's changed how I look at myself and how I look at the world." Others found that time away led to the development of new ideas: "there were some things that I was debating in my head about the organization. In coming back some puzzle pieces just really fit together in a way that they weren't fitting together before." On the organizational level, time away created a "pressure test" of organizational strength and health. Staffers were able to spread their wings and try new roles, while the leader on sabbatical witnessed the organization's ability to thrive without them. This was particularly valuable in smaller and grassroots nonprofits with strong founder-led presence:

> When I got back I heard, 'We missed you, but everybody did great.' That's what you want to hear. It helped work against my tendencies toward overwork and over-functioning in the system, and it was great for other staff and key leaders to realize their own power and influence.

Another surprising side effect of the sabbatical, particularly during the planning period, was the creation of formal process documentation that previously lived "in someone's head," creating more sustainable business practices for the organization. Additional cited benefits of sabbatical for organizations included the opportunity to observe team strengths and weaknesses; build

teamwork; and allow others to test-drive the role of executive director. On a personal level, subjects discovered a lifelong passion for travel; confirmed a passion for a new line of work; improved language skills; and generally returned to work feeling refreshed and enlightened.

    Challenges. A number of interviewees commented on how the American mentality works against understanding the value of rest. Perhaps one of the more common sentiments expressed by sabbatical recipients was the idea of "not knowing how to sabbatical." One sabbatical recipient indicated that a three-month volunteer trip abroad was an anomaly among other international travelers; most were spending a minimum of six months away. Other respondents expressed feelings of loneliness or dislocation, or missing a sense of daily structure: "in the Western world you're so used to going and doing – everything has a purpose. When you leave all of that it's really hard to structure your time." While most did not have any difficulty staying disconnected from work, the respondent from academia was mindful of annual reviews and the need to show productivity through publishing. Others found their organizations respectful of distance until closer to the end of sabbatical, when colleagues began to email more frequently. One subject indicated organizational fatigue on interim leadership, and an imbalance in preparation time for exit versus reentry; one of the core lessons learned from the experience was the need to give the organization more time to decompress before jumping back into the mix (suggestions on how to accomplish this task will appear in the section to come). Most respondents referenced a lifestyle dip or upset finances resulting from reduced pay or increased personal expenditure (even if receiving full salary). Interviewees suggested a number of recommendations on how to improve the impact of sabbatical for the individual on leave. Those who traveled generally agreed that it would be helpful to set roots rather than location hop. Others recommended journaling or setting a goal for the experience to feel more grounded amid

the dislocation of departure. Finally, one mentioned the importance of having realistic

expectations for the experience and a "go with the flow" attitude, expressing the sentiment that

"less is more."

      Workplace impact. The following section details organizational preparedness to cover

workplace duties and support sabbatical recipients during time away. This subtheme also

addresses reintegration strategies, and organizational reactions to a sabbatical recipient's return.

      Preparation strategy. Preparation periods for sabbatical ranged from one month to one

year, with six-months as a recommended median based on interview results. The majority of

respondents' organizations filled the sabbatical recipient's role through internal redistribution of

labor, rather than external hiring. Of those who did the latter, one had the role filled by an

adjunct professor and the other hired a part-time external consultant. There was still, however, "a

lot that was left to be spread around to other people in the organization to do." A number of

recommended practices emerged from the findings related to preparation. One subject suggested

identifying the best time of departure for the organization's workflow; summer in the church, for

example, tends to be slower and easier to cover. If a formal policy is in place, it is also important

to be mindful of when others are due for sabbatical and plan far enough in advance; for

illustration, when seven professors were eligible for sabbatical at the same time without the

department chair realizing, it threw the department into chaos. Proper planning leads to a more

fruitful experience for all involved. There is value in creating a planning committee to prepare

for the sabbatical experience. One subject created a six-person sabbatical team to think through

programming elements for the organization; the planning started with an audit of weekly

workflows and documentation of processes, followed by generation of ideas for how to announce

sabbatical to external constituents and cover responsibilities. Another tasked the board with

greater engagement and identified two internal managers to co-lead the organization. Two

subjects recommended applying for grant funding as a way to force proper preparation, as

application requirements provide a helpful guideline for setting clear expectations on the purpose

and structure of sabbatical for the organization. The overall sentiment is that proper planning for

sabbatical is a critical step in the process; not taking time to find the right interim leadership or

rushing the preparation period can break the success of the experience

     Reintegration strategy. Organizations were generally receptive to the sabbatical

recipient's return. One respondent switched gears to succession planning post-sabbatical and left

the organization six months later, feeling that the leadership team was more prepared because of

his absence; two years later, the entire team is still intact. Another subject experienced a sense of

disconnect upon reintegration; the team's maturation during their absence created a sense of

"urgency in the three-months post sabbatical" as they sorted out their own growth and

development and sought the next steps (or next place) to apply new knowledge. On the other side

of the equation, one sabbatical recipient shared this feeling of urgency related to personal

maturation; resuming the same role they vacated would feel like a step-down or plateau. This

individual indicated that it would be "demotivating to come back at the same level" and

encouraged the organization to view the new skills and views gained during sabbatical as a form

of job enlargement. Others noted exhaustion and burn out from those who took on extra labor.

For multiple respondents, there seemed to be a slight interpersonal clash between the sabbatical

recipient's new energy and vision, and the exhaustion of those left behind. Subjects

recommended a slow reintegration focused on the theme of personal reconnection; one

interviewee set up a schedule of coffees and dinners to maintain healthy relationships, while

another suggested establishing a series of facilitated conversations to debrief the experience. In

general, the sentiment was to "figure out how to create some space" to allow the relationship to

breathe and for growth to be internalized and applied productively.

    Cross-training. Most interviewees cited the growth and development of interim leaders

as a positive impact of the sabbatical experience. While responsibilities generally shifted back to

the sabbatical recipient upon return, sabbatical was a "good exercise in letting people spread

their wings" and allowed people who took on new roles to be "viewed with different eyes."

Another interesting side effect of sabbatical was the increased expedience with which some

interim leaders determined they *did not* want to progress to the next tier of leadership. In

multiple cases, sabbatical prompted voluntary turnover and allowed the organization to

"transition to investing more quickly in someone who *did* want to move on to that [next level]."

Some subjects alluded to significant stress placed on the individuals left behind: "the staff that

stepped into additional roles and carried extra weight felt the strain of it; it wasn't without

difficulty, but it wasn't negative." In other cases, the impact on internal leadership felt adverse:

"it was harder than they thought it would be and it was emotionally taxing because they were

trying to step into new roles and they really wanted to do it *well*." Here the concept of job

satisfaction and intrinsic motivation reappear; doing work well leads to satisfaction. Conversely,

the feeling of inability to be effective at ones job can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction.

    Sabbatical outcomes. The sabbatical outcomes subtheme assesses the relationship

between sabbatical and overall career contentment.

    Impact on job satisfaction. Only one respondent indicated a marginal decrease in the

level of job satisfaction post-sabbatical. This individual also speculated that demotivation might

correlate to recent organizational changes rather than the experience itself; they noted that

demotivation would have intensified had sabbatical not occurred. Other sabbatical recipients

reported feeling neutral to extremely positive in regards to their workplace motivation. One

stated that they did not feel an appreciable difference in satisfaction at work, but did feel a

renewed sense of purpose or commitment to their field: "it called me back to my grounding

principles." Another respondent reported feeling more attuned to personal likes and dislikes in

the workplace: "I am more selectively motivated or aware of the things I want to avoid, and more

honed in on the things I want to do." One participant found satisfaction in recognizing that the

organization was prepared to survive a leadership transition, giving confidence to retire: "I was

more satisfied [post-sabbatical]. I felt my team was ready to take on leadership and succeed me."

On the most positive end of the spectrum, one subject called the experience "life changing." For

this individual, satisfaction derived from having organizational buy-in and backing: "because the

board was able to support me in this way I felt even more positive about my organization.

Allowing me to step back and recharge really was a reset." This finding is consistent with one of

the core elements of job satisfaction cited by Knapp et. al (2017); perception of organizational

support (p. 653). A number of respondents referenced the development of new perspective

during sabbatical, returning to their organizations with renewed ideas for their role. One even

found a calling in a different field: "I realized I wanted something that feels more meaningful

and has greater purpose, including more exposure working with direct clients." Finally, one

participant called their increase in job satisfaction a direct result of increased personal happiness:

"My epiphany was that I can only be happy where I am if I am happy with who I am. I'm

happier where I am now because I'm happier with myself."

   Board support. Across the interviews, subjects highlighted the importance of board of

director support for sabbaticals, a condition that seems to facilitate the success of sabbaticals.

One non-recipient speculated that the need for increased board education posed an obstacle to the creation of a formal sabbatical policy in their organization:

> Sabbaticals are not always available to people in the corporate world where most of the board works. Rest is not in their culture, so they need to understand the difference between for-profits and non-profits and that there's an emotional toll [to nonprofit work] that maybe isn't present in the for-profit situation.

Among sabbatical recipients, some confirmed board reticence regarding sabbatical among corporate members. Others stated, "they got it right away." In general, it was helpful to have a supportive Executive Director or influential board chair to ring-lead comfort with the notion. Most boards seemed to understand the rest and renewal concept that characterizes nonprofit sabbaticals; of those who referenced the role of the board, none mentioned an expected call for strict parameters around the experience, or required outcomes reporting post-sabbatical.

Organizational culture. The researcher asked each interviewee to consider which traits of organizational culture help to foster sabbatical success. Multiple respondents mentioned the importance of an organization that "believes and invests in staff" and "understands the value of employees to the impact of the mission." Others referenced a culture that values work-life balance: "we talk a lot about work-life balance here but we don't always practice it." Many pointed to the significance of cultures of collaboration: "sabbatical requires a value system that incorporates cross-training, flexibility, and personal growth." Almost every respondent underscored the significance of relationships (with the board, executive director, or supervisors), echoing the sentiment that "you want an environment where, when you return, you believe people want you back." Additional traits include transparency and consistency in policies; organizational capacity; engaged board leadership; and a culture that rewards loyalty. Perhaps

most insightful was one respondent's identification of "a culture that sees the institution beyond a single personality and a single person's gifts." The ability to survive the absence of key leaders rests in an organization's capacity to consider the strength of the whole as a sum of its parts.

Lessons learned. After analyzing the findings, there seems to be one central sentiment resoundingly tied to sabbaticals: "do it." In the words of one interviewee, "we need to honor rest a little bit differently." Respondents who took sabbatical saw it as an effective staff retention policy "and a great way to pressure-test the organization. If it falls apart because one of us isn't here, we're doing something wrong anyway." In general, respondents felt that less is more when it comes to maximizing sabbatical. It is important to simplify expectations for the experience: "whatever you first think about [accomplishing] – cut it in half." Almost all agreed on the utility of a true disconnect from work, leaving enough time to reap the benefits of rest: "give yourself time and space for something different than work. It breeds health." Respondents also agreed that it was important to set the organization up for success by planning equally for both exit and reentry. An effective pre-sabbatical planning period will likely take six months to a year. To create buy-in, "have a greater conversation about what a sabbatical means to an organization." One respondent, for example, created a one-day seminar for the entire organization on the topic of rest. Forming a sabbatical planning team and applying for external grant funding can also help to create guidelines, map coverage strategies, and plan purpose behind the sabbatical. Finally, it is critical to make sabbatical available to all levels of the organization – and if possible, pay for them. In the concluding words of one sabbatical advocate:

> It is so much better to keep staff than it is to lose and replace them. I guarantee you if you were able to give sabbaticals more regularly in nonprofits you would keep experienced leaders longer and they would do better work.

      Sabbatical policy toolkit. Based on the above findings, the researcher identified seven

categories of sabbatical consideration, which anyone seeking to create a formal sabbatical policy

should contemplate (figure 2). This concept map is paired with a compilation of best practices,

recommendations, and lessons learned on ways to foster sabbatical success (figure 3). It is

worthwhile to note that these recommendations derive from a limited sample; while the

researcher has phrased certain items as conclusive statements, the researcher cautions the reader

to consider recommendations with the caveat of scope and scale in mind.

Figure 2. Seven Categories of Sabbatical Consideration
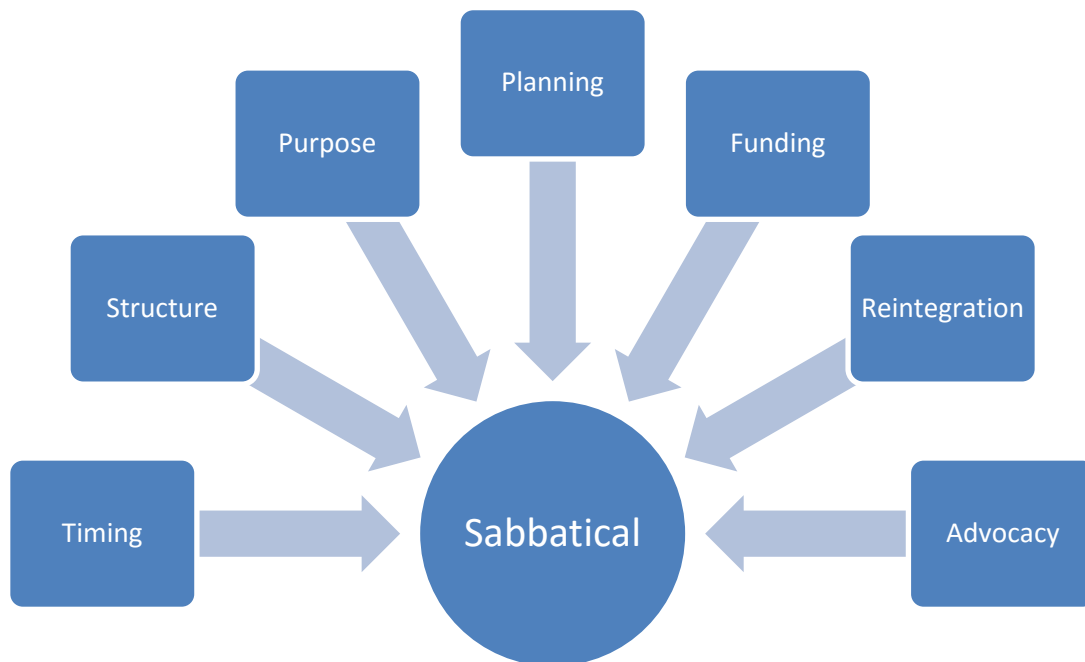
Figure 3. Seven Lessons Learned: Creating Successful Sabbaticals

Category	Lesson Learned	Key Takeaways and Recommendations
Timing	*Take sufficient time to unplug.*	• Recommended sabbatical length = 3 months • Consider annual workflow to identify ideal points of departure (e.g. summer, plan around fundraisers) • Decide if/how sabbatical is combinable with other forms of leave (e.g. maternity or paternity). • Be cognizant of when others are eligible for sabbatical to avoid overlap
Structure	*Equity matters.*	• It is recommended to make sabbatical available to all, regardless of where they are in the organization chart • Offer paid sabbaticals whenever possible • Consider leaving open parameters for the sabbatical experience • Do not require a tenure upon completion of sabbatical • Ensure that responsibilities will be covered or redistributed
Purpose	*Less is more; make rest a priority.*	• Try to disconnect from the workplace by shutting off email. • Set a personal goal to keep yourself grounded • Simplify: cut whatever you have planned in half
Planning	*Be intentional about what sabbatical means to the organization.*	• Recommended planning period = 6 months – 1 year • It is recommended to plan equally for departure and reentry • Audit weekly workflows and centralize documentation • Create a sabbatical planning team of key internal stakeholders • Map out a plan for messaging to constituents • Identify top performers ready for internal step-up opportunities • Vet interim leadership (if obtained externally) for fit • Plan on-boarding and cross-training days prior to departure • Involve your family in the process from day one
Funding	*Get creative with funds.*	• Seek external grant funding from foundations • Consider using vacation time to extend or create a paid sabbatical • Put sabbatical in the budget; get it approved by the board • Do not rule out an unpaid sabbatical • Allot bonuses for interim staff taking on extra work
Reintegration	*Create space.*	• Plan facilitated conversations to debrief the experience prior to jumping back in • Be cognizant of organizational maturation in absence • Acknowledge the fatigue of those who covered tasks • Assess your own growth; how has your role changed? • Reevaluate the roles of interim leadership; consider if growth warrants promotion
Advocacy	*Allot time to reflect.*	• Parlay the experience into a formal sabbatical policy • Find ways to share the sabbatical experience with others • Educate the board on the importance of rest.

Discussion

Introduction

Nonprofit organizations operate with limited budgets to invest in human capital, necessitating creative approaches to support their staff. Growth opportunities directly correlate to job satisfaction, which is critical to the retention of employees. Leadership development is particularly important to the next generation of [millennial] nonprofit leaders, who value career progression and seek opportunities to prove their impact in roles where they feel appreciated and challenged. While worker motivations to enter the nonprofit sector are often intrinsic, valuing service to others over extrinsic rewards like salary, they also seek a supportive environment that enables them to do meaningful work with a high level of efficacy. It is therefore wise for nonprofits to consider what motivates workers to sacrifice pay for purpose, and create cultures of support that enable employees to do meaningful work well. Nonprofit failure to support worker needs could lead to increased exportation of top talent to other sectors, and decreased ability to serve organizational missions. The fiscal drain of employee dissatisfaction is also clear, with turnover and rehiring expenses costing up to 150 percent of salary (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). While nonprofits may not be able to offer high compensation, they can offer competitive benefits that will appeal to the types of employees they wish to attract, hire, and keep.

One creative solution to strengthen the nonprofit workforce is the use of sabbaticals, an extended leave given to employees to reward years of loyal service. Sabbaticals support the concept of rest as a complementary element to work, creating a condoned opportunity to disconnect and revitalize body, mind, and spirit. Sabbaticals also aid growth and cross-training at the organizational level by allowing interim leadership to step into new roles in a colleague's absence. Although sabbaticals can create additional strain on interim leadership tasked with these

additional responsibilities, they also hold potential to foster employee growth while simultaneously counteracting the emotional fatigue of mission-driven work for the employee on leave. However, the sabbatical reward remains underutilized in the nonprofit sector. To gather more information about the structure and outcomes of the sabbatical retention strategy, this researcher identified existing literature on the theories of job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and rest, comparing them to previous studies on sabbaticals in a nonprofit context. To deepen understanding of how these concepts relate to the conditions that facilitate or serve as barriers to sabbatical success, the researcher conducted cross-sector interviews with individuals who could reflect on a prior sabbatical experience, or who could identify organizational gaps in supporting employees and consider the impact sabbatical might have on these elements.

Sabbaticals and job satisfaction. The review of the literature identified six core elements of nonprofit job satisfaction that include: perception of organizational support; opportunities for autonomy and growth; a clear sense of mission and purpose; an environment that enables job efficacy; a culture of appreciation; and personal satisfaction with life, which correlates to satisfaction on the job. Using Locke's (1976) theory of job satisfaction, which claims that satisfaction increases when employees see desired elements reflected in the workplace (Wu & Yao, 2006, p. 487), the researcher theorized that sabbatical could help nonprofit workers to feel satisfied, supported, and developed, leading to reduced turnover and increased contentment overall. The findings seem to confirm that sabbaticals hold potential to influence each of the six elements of job satisfaction. Sabbaticals show support for employees by acknowledging the value of rest, creating an approved opportunity to separate from the daily grind and seek holistic renewal. They create room for individuals to test-drive new roles and grow skill sets, breaking plateaus by continually providing step-up opportunities. True to Pang's

(2016) literature on theories of rest, respondents seemed to find that sabbaticals prompt creative

revitalization, renewing individual callings to the organizational mission and redefining a sense

of purpose. In turn, sabbaticals allow workers to be more engaged and effective at work,

returning refreshed to approach their jobs with new vision and vigor. When applied across

organizational levels as a reward for loyalty, sabbaticals are also a valuable tool for strategic

employee recognition, signaling appreciation for years of service. Finally, consistent with Saari

and Judge's (2004) identification of job satisfaction as a direct correlate to life satisfaction (p.

399), sabbatical recipients seem more attuned to self-care post-sabbatical, resulting in greater

clarity on value sets and how they might apply to or incorporate into elements of nonprofit work.

A discussion of the implications of these findings for various stakeholder groups, as well as

suggestions for extensions of this research, will appear in the section below.

Lessons Learned

The interview process revealed seven categories that nonprofit human resource

practitioners should consider when developing sabbatical structures, as well as seven related

lessons learned that support successful sabbatical experiences. The lessons learned are as

follows: (1) Sabbaticals should be long enough to truly rest, with a recommended length of three

months. (2) Consider making sabbaticals available to all full-time employees, regardless of

where they fall in the organizational chart, after a fixed period of tenure. (3) Disconnect from the

workplace entirely and focus on self-care. (4) Sabbatical success seems to depend on

preparation. To create buy-in, set the organization up for success by planning equally for

departure and reentry. (5) From external grants to creative combinations with vacation time,

sabbatical can be financially accessible to all organization types and sizes – it can even save the

organization money. (6) Sabbatical is an opportunity for job enlargement. Create space to

reassess personal and organizational growth during and after absence. (7) Carve out time to react

to the sabbatical and educate others in the organization and the nonprofit sector on the benefits

and challenges of the experience.

Implications

These lessons learned reveal a number of implications for subgroup populations, from

generational to organizational. A discussion of the implications on various stakeholders will

appear in the sections below.

Population served. Recalling Thomas' (2009) reflection on the intrinsic motivator of

purpose, employees find satisfaction when work is both important and effective (p. 49). In

Chapter 1, the researcher discussed the related concepts of absenteeism and compassion fatigue.

Although tied to different root causes (apathy versus emotional exhaustion), the common link

between these two concepts is indeed purpose. Those who suffer from absenteeism are no longer

able to detect the importance of the work, and those suffering from compassion fatigue may be

too weary to sustain high-performance in a long-term manner; in different ways, both elements

threaten to break down the efficacy of tasks performed. On one level, it is important for

employers to know that employees derive satisfaction from doing a job well. However, on a

grander scale, this finding holds even greater bearing on the ultimate stakeholder – doing work

well matters most for *the population served* in nonprofit organizations. Furthermore, as the

findings confirm, efficacy starts with self-care. Recall the reflection of one study participant, a

direct-service staff member at an afterschool program for children, who illustrated how the

emotional fatigue of teachers worn from years of work with children led to a lack of quality in

service delivery. Although children require and deserve care and nurture, these individuals

responded with irritation and disengagement due to fatigue. As the literature and findings

suggest, job satisfaction links to life satisfaction, and efficacy depends on rest and self-care. If employees are exhausted or have lost track of the importance of their work, waning motivation will hurt much more than just the employee – it will negatively affect the population served. To counteract the effects of this scenario, a break from the workplace in the form of extended time away can convert compassion *fatigue* into compassion *satisfaction* – by Mathieu's (2007) definition, intrinsic pleasure derived from doing work well. The offering of sabbatical signals to employees that an organization values longevity and understands the necessity of periods of rest, rejuvenation, and renewed vision. Sabbaticals can offer a solution that helps employees stay engaged in the mission of the organization over time.

Generational. As the literature revealed, millennials in the workplace seek expedience in growth opportunities. While nonprofits may not be able to deliver expedience, it is possible to meet halfway by offering consistency in the availability of stretch opportunities. Sabbaticals create space for cross-training and skills development; if the reward is made available to everyone at the organization, there will frequently be something new to learn.

Professional growth. According to the findings, sabbaticals offer a gateway to growth by allowing interim leaders to test-drive new roles. Sabbaticals also help organizations and individuals discover, in an accelerated timeline, if the available leadership trajectory is a mutual fit for the employee's interests and the organization's needs. The ability to use sabbaticals as a short-term test of growth potential satisfies the desire for expedience of the millennial generation; they learn if the organization is able to develop them in the ways they wish to grow, or they discover more quickly that it is time to move on.

While it is possible to argue that sabbaticals therefore help to retain sabbatical recipients but prompt turnover for interim leadership/non-recipients, it is worthwhile to note that turnover

in this context would be beneficial to the organization. In the best-case scenario, the organization finds renewed commitment and satisfaction from a worker who discovers enjoyment from the provision of growth and autonomy opportunities (one of the six core elements of job satisfaction). In the worst-case scenario, the organization loses an employee from voluntary turnover, but gains the opportunity to hire a better organizational fit who will bring new vision. In return, the employee who leaves gains new skills to enhance their résumé and a better understanding of their own likes and dislikes, allowing them to be more satisfied (and therefore more effective) at their next job. Harkening back to the researcher's earlier counterpoint to Kalleberg's (2007) free-rider theory, any enhancement of job skills is a benefit to the nonprofit sector at large, regardless of where the skills are applied. Thus, the side-effect of turnover for non-recipients, which multiple interviewees mentioned, could be viewed in a positive light.

Population decline. One unexpected finding of the interviews ties to generational impressions of existing leave structures, most prominently maternity and paternity leave. A number of interviewees alluded to feelings of discontent or resentment expressed by childless or younger employees who frequently absorb extra work during periods of colleague's absence. One subject noted that this population questioned, "When do I get to take three months off?" One of the benefits of sabbatical is that it evens the playing field by creating equity in an organization. Linking leave to years of service offers an opportunity to reward loyalty in a manner that is neutral to personal choices and circumstances. While sabbaticals are by no means a replacement for family leave, they do offer a compelling addition to the suite of existing leave programs. This is particularly relevant given that millennials are having fewer children than the generations before them. A 2015 report by the Urban Institute reveals that millennial women are reproducing at the slowest pace of any generation in the United States (Astone, Martin, & Peters,

2015). If this rate continues, the discrepancy between millennials and the generations before

them will widen, leaving room for discontentment to grow. Sabbatical, however, provides a

solution by offering something for everyone to look forward to – one reason why it is important

to offer sabbaticals to all employees, not just those in positions of leadership.

Generation "Me and "We". One frequently debated characteristic of the millennial

generation is "the nature of their social-service orientation. . . . Some experts characterize these

individuals as the most civically involved generation to date" (Ertas, 2016). However, there is a

split jury in the literature between calling millennials "Generation We" versus "Generation Me."

In other words, while natural tendencies might incline millennials to work in service-driven

organizations, they also need to see personal gain. Nonprofit sabbaticals offer an appealing

recruiting incentive; they allow millennials to satisfy their desire for a service-centered role,

while also providing access to a benefit that allows opportunity to pursue a personal passion

outside of work. Placing a waiting period on the reward incentivizes longevity in the service-

sector, while having a compelling reward that ties to elements of work-life balance offers an

appealing prospect to a generation focused on the dual culture of both "me" and "we."

Mental health. Finally, there are mental health implications to the sabbatical reward.

Projecting forward to Generation Z (those who will come after millennials), early research shows

that "one of the starkest markers of Gen Z to date is the sharp rise in reported mental health

issues (Barr, 2016). Recall that two of the core measures of job satisfaction are the perception of

organizational support and feelings of appreciation. The interviews further reveal key traits of

organizational culture that allow sabbatical to be successful, including a value set where the

organization "invests in staff," where "rest is valued" and where "people care about you." These

findings seem to suggest that the resiliency of the next generation of workers might depend on

increased provision of opportunities for self-care. While the sabbatical itself offers a chance for

rest and rejuvenation, the greater implication seems to be the need for organizations to adopt

cultures that are poised to make support for employees a priority in the first place. It is important

to note that cultures of collaboration and support cannot be forced into creation by the addition of

sabbatical; rather, they must be in place before the sabbatical reward can gain foothold – without

these elements, sabbatical is unlikely to be successful. Therefore, the desire to add a sabbatical

policy can prompt organizations to first think through and refine their value sets. Doing so will

not only make room for a creative reward, but will also serve to create organizational cultures

that will remain attractive to employees of both present and future generations.

Other nonprofits. Nonprofits need trailblazers to set the stage and report their

experience with sabbaticals in order to make this reward more commonplace in the sector. In

most cases, the addition or creation of a sabbatical policy requires board approval. Considering

that rest is countercultural to both the American mentality and the corporate mentality where

many board members work, there is a need for greater documentation on the benefits and

challenges of the experience in order to give other nonprofits fuel for the fire in making their

own policies. As one respondent mentioned: "If we can back it up with what other people are

doing…if it was a common practice in nonprofits, I think [the board] would respond positively."

If organizations wish to make sabbaticals more commonplace, there is a need to allot time and

space to reflect and report about the sabbatical experience.

Increased education. One of the lessons learned from the research was the need to build

time into the reentry period for the sabbatical recipients to reflect on their own experience, as

well as to listen to the experiences of those left behind. Refining a sabbatical policy requires

open communication and acknowledgement that growth occurs for both populations. As a

number of respondents indicated, humans can be forgetful creatures, and after returning from

sabbatical, it is easy to slip back into old habits – reflection time can easily fall to the wayside

amid the reality of work. To create access to this "life changing" opportunity for others,

recipients need to make the time to share their lessons learned.

Another cited obstacle to making sabbatical a widespread reward in nonprofits is the

notion of intimidation. Respondents who took sabbatical noted that colleagues were reticent to

buy into the reality that extended leave is something everyone can do with the right planning. As

one respondent notes, "I think people are just perplexed by the logistics. People are intimidated

by the concept." This study revealed a need for better education and encouragement at all levels

in the organization to show that there are true benefits to rest and time away. Without educating

and pushing individuals to take advantage of sabbatical, employees might allow the "always on"

American mentality to override their understanding of the value of rest, and eschew the

opportunity to take leave – even if a formal policy were in place. This finding underscores the

importance of sabbatical planning. As the lessons learned indicate, it is critical to be intentional

about what sabbatical means to the organization. Leaving time in the work plan to both prepare

for and debrief the experience will allow organizations to assess the impact of sabbatical on

overall operations. Increased education is critical to the success of the reward – both within

organizations, and in application to the contribution of knowledge to the sector more broadly.

With increased evidence of the impact of sabbatical, more employees at organizations with

sabbatical policies might understand that the reward is an attainable option, and more nonprofits

might be empowered to utilize or add this reward to their retention strategies.

Human resources. Human resource practitioners in nonprofits should acknowledge that

accommodating extended absences is not a new concept. Sabbatical is simply one more addition

to the existing collection of extended leaves. However, unlike other forms of leave (e.g. medical) which are more reactive in nature, sabbatical is a preventative step toward reducing burnout and maximizing the efficacy of the labor force. Human resource practitioners in nonprofits therefore might consider sabbatical through the lens of cost-savings associated with increased retention and reduced need for costly recruitment and rehiring. When viewed as a tool to accomplish these objectives, sabbaticals offer measurable outcomes in terms of return on investment; recall that turnover and rehiring expenses cost up to 150 percent of an employee's salary (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Sabbaticals are a strategic employee recognition award that support longevity by incentivizing long-term commitments. The findings related to board impressions of sabbatical also seem to confirm that they run countercultural to the mentality of the corporate setting. Therefore, the addition of a sabbatical policy can be a unique way for nonprofits to leverage creative benefits packages to distinguish themselves from corporate entities competing for top talent. From a talent development and career pathway perspective, sabbaticals also hold potential to counteract the effect of flat hierarchies and top-down decision-making. By creating opportunities for cross-training that foster internal talent development, employees across organizational levels will be better functionally informed on the tasks, challenges, and scopes of their peer's respective positions – shared knowledge holds potential to refine business practices that can help organizations to run more smoothly. Further, the documentation of processes that sabbaticals seem to prompt can create valuable strides in the preservation of organizational knowledge.

To maximize the impact of sabbatical, the findings seem to suggest that human resource practitioners should keep the elements of job satisfaction at the forefront when creating formal policies. To acknowledge the motivator of growth, it might behoove practitioners to define a

clear link between how sabbaticals translate to formal promotion or career pivot opportunities (for both the recipient and those left behind). To send a message of continual appreciation and support, practitioners might consider enacting tiered sabbatical rewards after set intervals (e.g. after seven years, employees receive two months off. After 14 years, employees receive three months off). Finally, to highlight the theme of autonomy over time, practitioners might clarify if the policy is "use it or lose it" or if there is a grace period after reaching eligibility (e.g. eligible at seven years, but free to take sabbatical anywhere between seven to ten years of employment). All of these considerations can help human resource professionals to elevate the structure of the sabbatical reward to complement the core motivations of individuals to remain in their jobs.

Fund development. Nonprofits organizations have the unique advantage of being eligible to qualify for external grant funding to support the sabbatical experience. Unlike corporate entities that offer sabbaticals, which typically derive from internal funds, there is a rising trend of foundation support for nonprofit sabbatical grants. Understanding that the perception of high cost can be a deterrent to the adoption of the sabbatical award in nonprofit organizations, fund developers might consider campaigning for the cause. The findings suggest that the very practice of considering and planning for the elements required of grant applications, which range from programming goals to workplace coverage plans, can even be an excellent exercise for overall organizational health.

As mission-driven entities that exist to serve a social purpose, the findings seem to confirm that there is little question from related parties (e.g. board members, donors) that most nonprofit professionals are deserving of a periods of rest. For illustration, recall one respondent's reference to a donor who felt that sabbaticals exclusively reserved for executive-level staff was not true to the organization's mission – this individual advocated to open the opportunity to all

employees across levels. Therefore, it might be worthwhile for fund developers to place attention on seeking external grant support – or fundraising directly for the experience – to make *paid* sabbaticals a realistic possibility for more individuals and organizations.

Limitations

This research study faced a number of limitations in data sampling and design. While the interviews offered sufficient evidence to assess the benefits and challenges of the sabbatical reward, the study would benefit from greater geographical diversity. In general, the number of individuals who have taken nonprofit sabbaticals is limited – this sample was further constrained by time limitations that prompted the researcher to focus heavily on convenience sampling. While the resultant population offered satisfactory depth of content, gathering even more perspectives would be of great interest in the future. Another obstacle to analysis was finding cohesion amid the variety of sabbatical structures and sizes. While there is no "one size fits all" way to structure sabbatical, reducing the number of variables (e.g. limiting data collection by organizational size/budget or population served) could allow for a more cohesive assessment of the sabbatical reward for tailored audiences or types of nonprofits.

Another limitation of this study was the exclusion of certain important populations from the study design. While the researcher intended to include the perspective of colleagues of sabbatical recipients, as well as foundations supporting sabbatical grants, limitations in time and access prevented collection of data from these subpopulations. One obstacle to securing the colleague perspective, in particular, stemmed from the interpersonal delicacy of asking coworkers to reflect about their experiences with one another. In a number of cases, interviewees mentioned that their sabbatical prompted turnover in interim leadership. While the interim leader perspective would be valuable to consider, it felt inappropriate to ask interviewees to identify

contact information for someone who chose to leave their organization. In a future study with more time to track down this contact information, however, this viewpoint would add an interesting layer of analysis.

Timing also posed a challenge in a slightly different way. In certain cases, interviewees no longer worked at the organizations to which the question sets pertained – one, for example, left for reasons of retirement (sabbatical recipient). Another left for reasons of dissatisfaction (non-recipient). While interviewees were able to provide candid feedback on their experiences, it is possible that their status of separation from the organization could have influenced their perceptions, skewing either overly positive or negative. To ensure neutrality, future researchers might find it worthwhile to revisit this study using subjects who remain active employees.

In regards to the survey instrument, there were no questions explicitly asking about the governing board's role in creating sabbatical strategies. While the role of the board arose through probing questions and through information volunteered via other question sets, in hindsight, the role of this population seems a critical component to the study in relation to sabbaticals in nonprofit organizations. For example, questions on the approval process for sabbatical policies, or on board-imposed constraints around the sabbatical structure, could reveal another set of interesting obstacles or opportunities for consideration.

Future Research

This exploratory study contributes to and expands the scholarship by analyzing the link between theories of job satisfaction and the model sabbatical in nonprofit contexts. While the crux of the research focused on applying a theoretical framework to a practical human resource benefit, future investigators might consider a number of extensions to this study. One possible avenue for exploration is to consider the benefits and challenges of the sabbatical experience

from the perspective of interim leadership, or colleagues of sabbatical recipients. Much of the

available literature on sabbatical focuses on the perspective of sabbatical recipients. This study

expands the current scholarship by widening the scope to consider the viewpoint of human

resource professionals and workers at organizations that do not offer sabbatical. However, it

seems that the population most impacted by sabbatical (beyond the recipient) are those left

behind during a coworker's absence. The researcher would recommend conducting an in-depth

longitudinal study of one organization with a formal sabbatical policy, analyzing the impact of

the reward by gathering the perspectives of employees across organizational levels.

      Another interesting extension of this study would be to examine written sabbatical

policies, with the goal of providing a toolkit to aid organizations in creating their own sabbatical

documentation. While this research identified seven core categories of consideration to help with

this objective, it did not explore or propose a structure for what a formal policy should look like

in application. One challenge to this analysis would be the relative lack of written sabbatical

documentation available in most organizations that offer the reward. Recall that many

individuals self-initiate sabbaticals, rather than take them because of a policy already in place.

However, as the literature expands on sabbatical efficacy, there will be an increased need for

organizations to have access to best practices for written policies across organizational types.

      For the purposes of this study, the researcher focused on gathering individual

perspectives on the sabbatical reward. While the findings also discussed elements of

organizational impact and culture, these topics were ancillary to the individual findings. One

possible avenue for future study includes a streamlined focus on the organization itself. The

researcher would be particularly interested in assessing how organizational lifecycle influences

the success of the sabbatical award; are sabbaticals more effective during grassroots or start-up

stages, or are they most poised for success in mature organizations? It would be intriguing to

consider the most appropriate point in the nonprofit lifecycle to introduce the sabbatical reward.

The results of all of these study extensions could reveal new insights on sabbatical that would

contribute to the validity of the concept both within and beyond the nonprofit sector.

Conclusion

This research study sought to deepen understanding of the link between the concepts of

job satisfaction and the experience of sabbatical, which ties to objectives of rest and rejuvenation

in nonprofit contexts. While the findings confirm that sabbaticals are constructive ventures

worthy of praise, it seems that their correlation to job satisfaction is relatively neutral; most

subjects reported an equal measure of dedication to the organization before and after sabbatical.

However, it is evident from the interviews that sabbatical helps individuals to find renewed

focus, aids organizations in developing leadership pipelines, and creates time and space for

dedicated workers to practice self-care. Indeed, perhaps the strongest correlate is the connection

between sabbatical and life satisfaction. With extended time away to travel, pursue passions

outside of work, and disconnect from the daily grind, increased contentment with life seems to

spill over to bear positive fruits on the job. Sabbaticals therefore serve as a preventative measure

to reduce the risk of burnout; periods of rest allow workers to be more effective and creative

when they return, satisfying intrinsic motivations that might translate to increased satisfaction

and retention overall. By offering sabbaticals, nonprofits offer support. While sabbatical is not a

panacea that cures all measures of employee dissatisfaction, it is a reward with great potential to

counteract negative elements of organizational culture and keep the nonprofit sector an attractive

workplace for the current workforce, and for many generations to come.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

<u>Project Description</u>
The purpose of this research study is to investigate how sabbaticals affect job satisfaction and retention in nonprofit organizations, utilizing cross-industry interviews to establish a framework through which to study sabbatical efficacy. Participation will involve a personal interview that will take approximately thirty to sixty minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Once transcribed, original recordings will be deleted.

<u>Benefits and Risks of Research</u>
The benefits of the research entails furthering our knowledge of sabbaticals as an intervention strategy to impact job satisfaction and retention in nonprofit organizations. One potential risk of the research is bringing up potentially negative feelings or emotions through questions related to organizational culture. There are no direct benefits to you as a participant, but the investigator hopes that the findings of this study will inform the work of human resources departments in nonprofit organizations.

<u>Principal Investigator</u>
The principal investigator is Beth Anne Spacht. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Beth Anne Spacht at bethanne.spacht@richmond.edu or by phone at (804) 405-9237. Beth Anne is working under the supervision of Dr. Andrew Schoeneman, contacted at aschoene@richmond.edu.

<u>Voluntary Participation</u>
Your participation in this project is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in the project at any time without penalty. You are also free to decline to answer any question(s) that you do not wish to answer. If you choose to withdraw or terminate participation at any time, you will have the choice of whether your responses until that point are included in the study or not.

<u>Confidentiality of Records</u>
Reasonable steps will be taken to maintain confidentiality of your individual responses. You will be assigned an identification number and all of your feedback will be connected to this identification number rather than your name. The names of interview participants and organizations will not be included in the research project. The interview audio will be recorded and transcribed. Once the recordings are transcribed, the original recordings will be deleted. The interview transcriptions will be removed of all participant identifiers. Any information that would lead to a specific person or organization being identified will be altered or removed as needed. In sum, reasonable steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of your responses. However, absolute confidentiality cannot be assured. You are cautioned against disclosing information or opinions that will place you at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to your financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

<u>Use of Information and Data Collected</u>
Information gathered in this research study will be used in scholarly presentations and a graduate school research paper, and may be submitted for publication or posted on the Internet. You will not be identified in any publication or public presentation.

<u>Participant's Rights Information</u>
If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Richmond's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research at (804) 484-1565 or irb@richmond.edu for information or assistance.

<u>Participant's Consent</u>
The study has been described to me and I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation in the project at any time without penalty. I also understand that the results of the study will be treated in strict confidence and reported only in group form. I understand that if I have any questions or concerns about this experiment, I may pose them to Beth Anne Spacht or Dr. Schoeneman using the information provided above.

I have read and understand the above information and I consent to participate in this study by signing below. Additionally, I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Witnessing Researcher: _____

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Previous Sabbatical Recipients

Background

Demographics, Motivations, and Turnover
- Please describe your role at your organization.
- How many years have you worked at your current organization?
- What motivates you about your current role?
- What are the top two reasons you think employees at your organization turnover? Any others?

Retention, Recruiting, and Succession Planning
- What are your organization's biggest challenges when it comes to recruiting new employees?
- Does your organization have a formal promotion plan or career ladder?
- What growth opportunities/non-financial incentives are currently available to employees?
- How does your organization prepare for the possibility of a staff member leaving or retiring?

Sabbatical Experience

Sabbatical Structure
- What are the eligibility requirements for sabbatical at your organization?
- How many years were you employed at your organization prior to taking sabbatical?
- What was your primary motivation to take sabbatical (research, volunteer work, travel, other)?
- How long was your sabbatical?
- Was your sabbatical paid?
- What did your sabbatical experience entail?
- What level staff could you see benefiting most from a sabbatical experience (entry, mid-level, executive, other)?

Sabbatical Impact

Personal Impact
- What, in your experience, were your top two benefits of taking a sabbatical? Any others?
- What were your top two challenges of taking a sabbatical? Any others?
- In your experience, was your sabbatical too long, too short, or appropriately timed?
- What was the biggest surprise of your sabbatical experience?
- What would have made your sabbatical more fulfilling?
- What positive or negative outcomes have you seen from your sabbatical experience in regards to your work performance and motivation?
    - Are you more or less inclined to stay longer at the organization?
    - Are you more or less satisfied at work post-sabbatical compared to pre-sabbatical?
- If you were to take a sabbatical again, what would you change? What would you keep the same?

Workplace Impact
- How did your workplace prepare for your sabbatical absence?
    - How long was the sabbatical planning period?
    - How were your workplace responsibilities covered?
- What were the financial implications of sabbatical on your organization?
- In what ways did your absence impact the workplace?
    - What positive experiences resulted from your absence?
    - What negative experiences resulted from your absence?
- How did your sabbatical affect cross-training for other staff?
- In what ways did your organization support your sabbatical experience?
- Were there any ways in which you did not feel supported?
- Did you experience any interpersonal challenges upon reintegration from your time away?
- How would you improve the current model of sabbaticals in your organization to deliver increased impact?

Future Learning

- What advice would you give to organizations considering supporting sabbaticals?
- What are reasons why someone might choose not to take a sabbatical if the option were available?
- In your experience, what core elements of workplace culture help sabbaticals to be effective?
- In your experience, what obstacles might prevent a workplace from supporting sabbaticals?
- Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience related to sabbaticals?
- Who else do you think I should talk to about this subject?

Probing Questions

In order to obtain additional information, clarification, or examples, the following probing questions may be asked as a follow-up to any of the questions listed above:
- Can you elaborate more about x?
- Can you provide an example of y?
- Will you please clarify z?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Staff at Organizations that Do Not Offer Sabbatical

Background

Demographics, Motivations, and Turnover
- Please describe your role at your organization.
- How many years have you worked at your current organization?
- What motivates you about your current role?
- What are the top two reasons you think employees at your organization turnover? Any others?
- What two changes would improve your overall satisfaction with your job? Any others?

Retention, Recruiting, and Succession Planning
- What are your organization's biggest challenges when it comes to recruiting new employees?
- Does your organization have a formal promotion plan or career ladder?
- What growth opportunities/non-financial incentives are currently available to employees?
- How does your organization prepare for the possibility of a staff member leaving or retiring?

Sabbatical Experience

Sabbatical Structure
- If you were to take a sabbatical, what would be your primary motivation (research, volunteer work, travel, other)?
- Would you accept an unpaid sabbatical? Why or why not?
- What do you feel is the most appropriate length for a sabbatical experience?
- What level staff could you see benefiting most from a sabbatical experience (entry, mid-level, executive, other)?

Sabbatical Impact

Personal impact
- What would be the top two benefits of taking sabbatical in your current position? Any others?
- What would be the top two challenges of taking sabbatical in your current position? Any others?

Workplace Impact
- How might your workplace prepare to cover responsibilities for a staff member on sabbatical?
- How might a sabbatical affect cross-training for other staff?
- In your opinion, should nonprofits support sabbaticals for employees?
- What work culture traits would be necessary for sabbaticals to be effective in your organization?
- What obstacles might impede the implementation of sabbaticals on an organizational level?
- What are two reasons you might not choose to take a sabbatical, if the option were available?

Probing Questions

In order to obtain additional information, clarification, or examples, the following probing questions may be asked as a follow-up to any of the questions listed above:

- Can you elaborate more about x?
- Can you provide an example of y?
- Will you please clarify z?