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A Multicase Study Exploring the Motivation of Support Staff in the Office of the Registrar

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A Multicase Study Exploring the Motivation of Support Staff in the Office of the Registrar

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Higher Education

by

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Abstract

Although a large body of research exists within higher education that focuses on factors related to faculty motivation and student motivation, there is limited research concentrated on the motivation of college and university administrative staff. This study examined how job duties, work processes, elements of the work environment, and leadership styles are related to employee motivation, specifically the motivation of front-line support staff who work in the Office of the Registrar. Additionally, I aimed to identify any disconnect between what support staff need and want from supervisors in the Office of the Registrar pertaining to motivation and supervisors' behavior to encourage high levels of motivation. The theoretical framework utilized Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivation Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

This study involved Office of the Registrar personnel at two regional, public, four-year, non-system affiliated institutions in the Four State Area (Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma) with a student population of no more than 10,000. The two institutions were randomly selected. The registrars from each institution participated in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews and document analysis. Additionally, four support staff members participated in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews and document analysis regarding the registrars' leadership. Participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of current motivation levels of support staff in the office and how work responsibilities and the work environment affect motivation. Furthermore, participants were asked to discuss strategies used by registrars to motivate the staff and whether those motivators were successful. By coincidence, this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic which strongly influenced the study results.

Acknowledgements

This research study is the combined effort of many individuals to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude. I could not have been successful in this endeavor without all of them by my side. Many thanks to all of you for playing such important roles in the completion of this project.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Office of the Registrar provides operations and services which are critical to an institution's ability to carry out its mission and vision. Office of the Registrar responsibilities are vast and varied, and typically include the maintenance of student academic records, issuing transcripts, transfer course evaluation and articulation, degree conferrals, certifying enrollment verifications, oversight of classroom scheduling, catalog publication, assistance with the planning and preparation of commencement exercises, advising the campus community on policy formation and revision, distributing regalia and diplomas, assisting students with enrollment functions, publishing the university calendar and important dates, facilitating the grading process, reporting data to third parties such as National Student Clearinghouse and National Student Loan Data System, scheduling final exams, and supporting the campus in a multitude of other important ways.

Lanier (2006) discussed how the role of the registrar has expanded to include even more functions in recent years. Registrars are becoming more active in policy development, are more frequently asked to provide data to comply with the increase of state and federal reporting requirements, and have greater concerns about privacy and access to data because of the increase in data vulnerabilities and breaches (Lanier, 2006). Quann (1979) wrote that the campus registrar is one of the institution's key administrators who oversees all of these vital functions which support a large group of individuals, academic departments, and administrative units. The campus registrar cannot perform all of these responsibilities alone. Preinkert (2005) stressed the importance of teamwork and delegation within the office since a campus registrar relies on "a group of assistants with the initiative and constructive ability, with whom they are able to share

responsibility” (p. 9). Therefore, it is crucial for the registrar to have the ability to assemble and maintain a team of capable, dependable, and highly motivated employees. Although this team provides services that are essential to the operation of the institution, team members can fail to recognize the importance and value of their work. When this happens, employees become at risk for experiencing problems with motivation.

Description of the Problem

When employee motivation in the Office of the Registrar is low the negative effects can permeate within the office and across the entire campus. Accuracy may decline as unmotivated employees no longer put forth the same amount of effort to perform job duties to the best of their abilities. According to Blaney (2009), accuracy has been found to influence student persistence and retention. When the work produced by the Office of the Registrar is not accurate, students may enroll in courses that they do not need, they may be told in error that they have not met the requirements for graduation, and grades may be recorded incorrectly causing students to be mistakenly placed on academic probation or suspension. When low motivation leads to poor attitudes, especially among front-line staff who serve as the face of the office and the institution, a result can be poor customer service experiences. Poor customer service experiences can negatively influence prospective students’ choices to attend and may be a reason for enrolled students to transfer somewhere else. The office may see an increase in absenteeism as employees begin to have trouble finding the motivation to come to work. When absenteeism is high, productivity often declines. Lower productivity means that transfer students wait longer for their transcripts to be articulated. Having to wait may make them more likely to attend another institution that is able to process their transcripts more quickly. Morale may suffer among staff left in the office who are constantly picking up the slack for the absent employees.

Unmotivated employees may decide to pursue employment opportunities in other units on campus or leave the institution altogether. Preinkert (2005) asserted that “continuity of employment is more important in the registrar’s office than in most other offices in the institution” (p. 9). Employee turnover can cripple an office as employees may resent having to constantly pick up the slack until a new employee is hired, assist with training new employees, and correct mistakes made by new employees.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how job duties, work processes, elements of the work environment, and leadership styles are related to employee motivation, specifically the motivation of front-line support staff who work in the Office of the Registrar. Additionally, I aimed to identify any disconnect between what support staff need and want from supervisors in the Office of the Registrar pertaining to motivation and what supervisors are actually doing to encourage high levels of motivation. Although a search of the literature revealed a large body of research within higher education that focuses on factors related to faculty motivation and student motivation, there is limited research concentrated on the motivation of college and university administrative staff. This study could possibly inspire future studies which would fill this gap in the literature. Future studies focusing on the motivation of staff, particularly support staff in enrollment services departments such as bursar, financial aid, advising, admissions, and registrar would assist leaders in identifying employees’ needs and preferences regarding motivation. Interviews, surveys, observation, document analysis, and focus groups that consult Office of the Registrar staff could provide insight on how job duties, work processes, elements of the work environment, and leadership styles affect their levels of motivation. Office of the Registrar managers can use this information to reevaluate job duties, improve work processes, modify the

work environment, and adjust their leadership styles to meet goals at the departmental, divisional, and institutional levels.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding the study is: What motivates support staff in the Office of the Registrar? Additionally, this study attempts to answer the following subquestions:

1. How do participants describe their personal motivation level, the motivation levels of their coworkers, and the motivation levels of their support staff?
2. How do participants view the job duties/work processes they (or their support staff) perform in relation to motivation?
3. How do participants view elements of the work environment (compensation, financial incentives, relationships, recognition, etc.) in relation to motivation?
4. How do participants view leadership styles and behaviors in relation to motivation?

Limitations and Underlying Assumptions

Several limitations and underlying assumptions are evident in this study. First, the selection of the institutions and participants involved is a limitation. According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are more than 4,000 institutions of higher learning in the United States. It would be impossible for the lone researcher to work with such a large number of colleges and universities for this study, so it was necessary to narrow down the institutions that were invited to participate. Due to time and geographic constraints, convenience sampling was used in this study to select participants from two institutions. Although this sampling method saves time and money, is convenient for the researcher, and can serve as a starting point for future research, there can be issues with the quality of the results and the credibility of the study

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). A multiple case approach was used for this study as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) who explained that “the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings” of a study can be strengthened by increasing the number of cases involved (p. 40).

Second, the characteristics of the selected institutions may prevent future researchers from replicating the results as well as transferring the findings to other institutions. This study involved Office of the Registrar personnel at two regional, public, four-year, non-system affiliated institutions in the Four State Area (Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma) with a student population of no more than 10,000. Although Offices of the Registrar, regardless of institutional size or ties to a university system, provide similar services, strive to meet similar goals, and face similar challenges, the results of this study may not be transferable to institutions with a different organizational structure, mission, size, and location.

A final limitation to this study is related to the data collection methods that were used. Data collected were limited to only the data that were gathered through interviews and document review. The COVID-19 pandemic forced in-person interviews to be held virtually through the Zoom video conferencing platform. Additionally, because qualitative research relies on the researcher to gather data and then draw conclusions from that data, there is the possibility that I may have failed to recognize data as important or overlook it altogether.

Underlying assumptions of the study included the following:

1. Support staff were able to describe their level of motivation (high to low) as well as their perceptions of their coworkers’ levels of motivation. Registrars were able to describe the level of motivation of support staff.

2. Support staff were familiar with and were able to articulate factors that motivate/demotivate them. Registrars were able to articulate factors that motivate/demotivate support staff.
3. Support staff were familiar with the leadership behaviors of the registrar as well as the registrar's strategies to encourage high levels of motivation. Registrars were able to describe their leadership styles and methods used to encourage high levels of motivation for support staff.
4. Participants freely provided honest answers and opinions.

Definition of Key Terms

Case study research. Creswell and Poth (2018), describe case study research as:

a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observation, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (pp. 96 – 97)

Leader. A leader is an individual who “influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2007, p. 3).

Leadership. Leadership is “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2007, p. 3).

Manager/Supervisor. A manager/supervisor is an employee whose position at work is above that of another person, and who supervises the work of that person.

Motivation. Motivation is the desire to act or behave in a particular way (Benabou and Tirole, 2003).

Multicase study. A multicase study is case study research that involves two or more similar cases.

Office of the Registrar. A unit with the mission:

to preserve the integrity, accuracy, and privacy of all academic records; to interpret institutional and governmental policies to members of the academic and general community; and to efficiently distribute these records in full compliance with applicable policies, laws, and regulations (Young, 2006, p. 2).

Depending on the organizational structure of an institution, the Office of the Registrar may report to one of the following divisions: academic affairs, student affairs, or enrollment services.

Registrar. The campus registrar is one of the institution's key administrators who oversees vital functions which support a large group of individuals, academic departments, and administrative units (Quann, 1979).

Support staff. Employees in the Office of the Registrar who are supervised by a more senior person, such as the registrar, associate registrar, assistant registrar, or director of student records. Support staff within the Office of the Registrar usually hold titles such as registrar's assistant, student services representative, graduation specialist, enrollment specialist, transfer credit specialist, or administrative assistant.

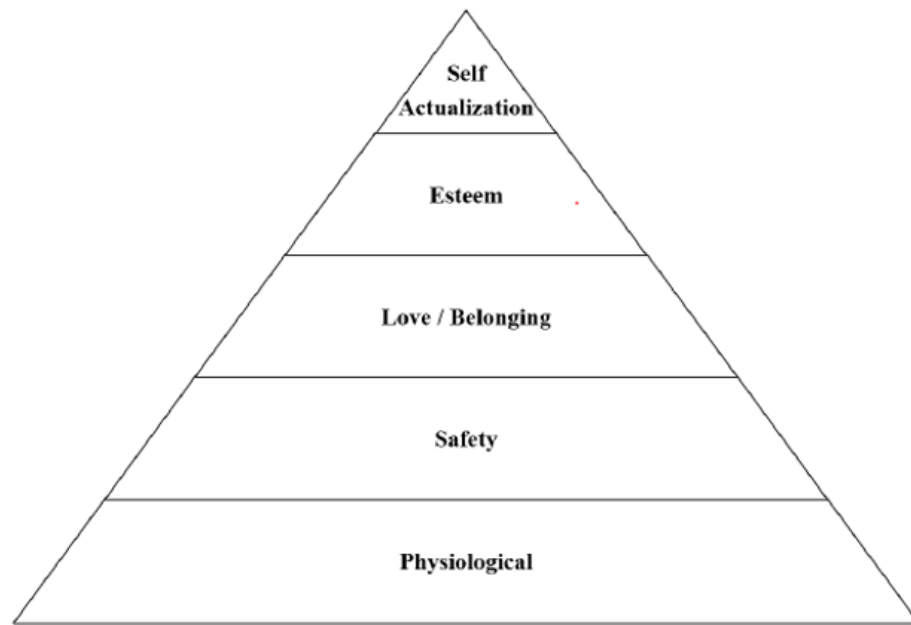
Conceptual Framework

Multiple theories exist regarding motivation in general and more specifically, motivation as it pertains to work and the workplace. One of the most well-known general theories of motivation is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow (1954) asserted that humans have internal needs and that these needs fall naturally into a hierarchy based on their strength. Needs drive individuals to act, Maslow (1954) asserted, and an individual's behavior at any given time

reflects one of five categories of needs that they are attempting to meet. Once a need has been met, that need no longer determines an individual's behavior and is replaced by another need (Maslow, 1954). Figure 1.1 illustrates the hierarchy of the five categories of needs: physiological needs, safety and security needs, social and belongingness needs, ego, status, and self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1954). Physiological needs are the most basic human needs, which include food, water, and sleep, and form a foundation for the higher categories. Lower level needs must be met before an individual can be motivated by higher level needs (Maslow, 1954). Several categories of needs are relevant to this study. First, safety and security needs encompass personal security, emotional security, and financial security (Maslow, 1954). Fair and adequate financial compensation is just one of many needs that individuals look to a job to satisfy. Second, social and belongingness needs include friendships and a sense of connectedness with others (Maslow, 1954). These needs, Maslow (1954) explained, can be satisfied by a variety of social groups, both large and small. One such group is a group of coworkers. Finally, the ego, status, and self-esteem needs category consists of recognition, acceptance, a sense of value to others, and respect. A job is often one method of satisfying these needs.

In addition to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, also known as the two-factor theory, guided this study. While Maslow (1954) focused solely on intrinsic motivation, or the internal drivers of behavior, Herzberg (1966) incorporated extrinsic motivation, or the external drivers of behavior, into the two-factor theory. Although the theory

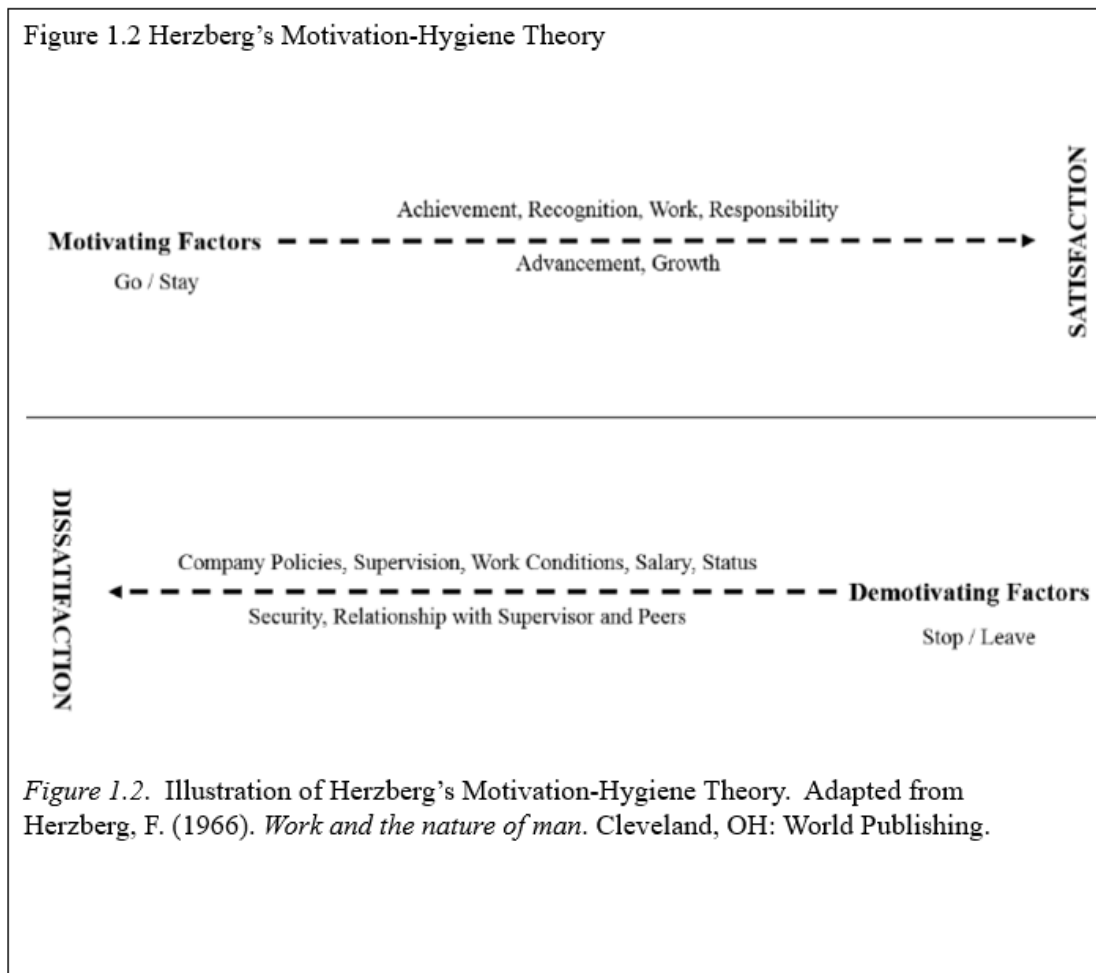
Figure 1.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



*Figure 1.1. Illustration of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Adapted from Maslow, Abraham H. (1954). *Motivation and Personality*, New York: Harper and Row.*

was developed from a relatively small population of accountants and engineers more than 40 years ago, it has since been applied to a much broader population of workers in a wide range of fields at varying levels within organizations (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996). In interviews with the accountants and engineers, Herzberg (1966) asked them to discuss what they liked and disliked about their jobs and their workplaces. According to Herzberg (1966), job satisfaction and dissatisfaction come from different, independent sources: motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators lead to job satisfaction and are intrinsic to the actual work performed (Herzberg, 1966). Examples of motivators include responsibility, meaningful work, recognition, a sense of contribution to the organization, and challenging work (Herzberg, 1966). Hygiene factors, extrinsic to the actual work performed, do not result in higher motivation or satisfaction but rather lead to dissatisfaction if they are not present or are perceived as inadequate

(Herzberg, 1966). Examples of hygiene factors include salary, fringe benefits, company policies, and supervisory styles (Herzberg, 1966). In other words, Herzberg (1966) found that when participants were satisfied, they were satisfied because of the work itself; when participants were dissatisfied, they were dissatisfied because of the work environment.



Significance of Study

This study is significant because it has implications for professional practice and future research. Although there is an abundance of research concerning motivation in higher education, these studies center almost exclusively on the motivation of faculty and students, not non-

academic staff. As previously mentioned, studies focused on the motivation of personnel working in enrollment services units such as bursar, admissions, advising, and registrar are rare.

First, results of this study could have implications for professional practice. Supervisors and managers have access to many tools, several of which are low-cost and require little effort to implement, that can be used to raise motivation levels and keep them high. This study sought to shed light on what Office of the Registrar support staff need to sustain high levels of motivation. Managers can use appropriate leadership strategies to increase the commitment, productivity, effectiveness, and retention of their employees. This in turn could positively benefit the quality of customer service that the office delivers to the campus and other stakeholders. This study also sought to identify job duties that contribute to high and low levels of motivation. Office of the Registrar managers may use these findings to develop recruiting strategies to ensure a match between candidates' needs and job duties. As previously mentioned, tasks performed by support staff in the Office of the Registrar can become repetitive. As a result of this study, managers may also consider asking questions during job interviews that assess the candidates' ability to work in an environment where tasks are frequently repeated.

Second, this study could have implications for future research. Qualitative methods were used to examine the motivation of staff within the Office of the Registrar at two regional, non-system affiliated, four-year, regionally accredited, public institutions located in the Four State Area of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma with fewer than 10,000 enrolled students. Future studies could employ a quantitative or mixed methods approach. As is typical with qualitative research, this study involved a small sample; however, future researchers would be able to greatly expand the number of individuals from which data is collected by making use of a survey. Future researchers could also choose to focus on a mixed group of individuals from

several units within enrollment services, or as with this study, choose to focus on only one unit. Another direction researchers could take is studying where enrollment services units fall on the organizational chart and if that has an impact on employee motivation. At some institutions, enrollment services units report to the student affairs division; at other institutions, enrollment services units report to the academic affairs division. Enrollment services units may also be organized into a separate, stand-alone enrollment services division. Future researchers could also expand this study by examining institutions with a variety of types, missions, and sizes. Finally, rather than focusing on support staff within enrollment services, future research could involve employees who hold higher ranking positions within the Office of the Registrar or enrollment services units.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction and overview of the research study. The overarching research question was identified as: What motivates support staff in the Office of the Registrar? The conceptual framework of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory was highlighted, limitations and underlying assumptions of the study were identified, key terms were defined, and the purpose and significance of this study were explained. In Chapter 2, literature regarding workplace motivation is explored in order to form a basis for this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this multicase study was to examine how job duties, work processes, elements of the work environment, and leadership styles are related to employee motivation, specifically the motivation of support staff who work in the Office of the Registrar.

Additionally, I sought to identify any disconnect between the needs and wants of support staff and the strategies used by Office of the Registrar supervisors to encourage high levels of motivation. The overarching researching question guiding the study is: What motivates support staff in the Office of the Registrar? To accomplish the goal of this study, it was necessary to conduct a review of literature related to this topic.

The University of Arkansas online library was the main source for this literature review, which is comprised of research collected from primary sources. Scholarly peer-reviewed research studies in academic journals from a variety of disciplines were reviewed, accessed by using the following search terms: *motivation, employee, turnover, work environment, leadership, boredom, recognition, praise, compensation, teleworking, student affairs, and new employee onboarding*. Additionally, several books, professional journals, and Internet resources were reviewed and included in this literature review. I strove to include recent studies as much as possible in this literature review by searching for studies published within the last five years. However, this literature review also contains several relevant older studies and resources. I also strove to include as much as possible literature related to student affairs and enrollment services. Since there is a shortage of research in these areas as previously mentioned, it was necessary to include literature outside of higher education.

This literature review begins with a brief introduction of high and low motivation in the workplace and the relationship between motivation and voluntary employee turnover. Next, this literature review focuses on a few of the many factors that influence employee motivation: routine work processes and job duties, motivation and the work environment, motivation and the physical work environment, and leadership styles and strategies. This chapter concludes with a brief summary.

Recognizing High and Low Motivation

Managers must become skilled at identifying the signs of high and low motivation because of the impact on the amount of work produced and the quality of work produced. While employees with low levels of motivation will disengage from the work environment and job duties, employees who have high levels of motivation will be highly involved with the work environment and job duties (van Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, & Schreurs, 2012). Although commitment to work is a good quality, van Beek, Hu, Schaufeli, Taris, and Schreurs (2012) cautioned that too much commitment can be problematic, as is the case with workaholic employees. These employees invest a great deal of energy into their work, often at the expense of their health and personal relationships (van Beek et al., 2012). Of the three types of job-related well-being (workaholism, work engagement, and burnout), work engagement is most desirable. Work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind (van Beek et al., 2012). When it comes to motivation, managers should work toward keeping employees within the zone of work engagement.

Voluntary Employee Turnover

Voluntary employee turnover is an ongoing problem that has significant effects on a workplace's ability to operate at optimum levels. Because the Office of the Registrar provides

many important functions to the campus community, retaining staff who possess institutional knowledge and technological know-how is crucial. Employees who choose to leave their positions on their own volition do so for a variety of reasons, such as accepting employment with another company, going back to school, and dissatisfaction with job duties and/or the work environment. Although workplace leaders cannot prevent all employees from leaving, by altering their approach to leadership, reexamining job duties, and improving work processes, they may be able to raise motivation levels among employees who are considering leaving primarily because of issues with motivation.

Tull (2006) explored the relationship between the perceived level of synergistic supervision received and the turnover intentions of new professionals in student affairs. Synergistic supervision, according to Tull (2006), involves the discussion of long-term career goals, discussion of excellent performance, discussion of inadequate performance, and frequent informal feedback regarding performance. Benefits to synergistic supervision include open communication, positive relationships, the identification of the professional aspirations of staff, and the identification of the knowledge and skills necessary for staff to advance (Tull, 2006). Participants were recruited from the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) membership directory, and included 435 individuals who self-identified on their membership applications that they had worked in the field for five years or less. These individuals were contacted by email and provided with a link to an online survey. Participants represented a variety of institutional types and functional areas. Synergistic supervision was measured using a 22 item scale, which included statements such as “My supervisor is open and honest with me about my strengths and weaknesses,” “My supervisor rewards teamwork,” and “When problem solving, my supervisor expects staff to present and advocate differing points of view.” Turnover

intention was measured by three items: “How likely is it that you will actively look for a new job in the next year?,” “I often think about quitting,” and “I will probably look for a new job in the next year.” Results showed a significant negative correlation between perceived level of synergistic supervision received and turnover intentions.

Outside of higher education, Gardner, Wright, and Moynihan (2011) conducted a quantitative research study to examine the relationship between motivation-enhancing practices and voluntary employee turnover. Surveys were administered to two groups of workers at a food distribution company. Group one consisted of 20 managers who were asked to report the usage of motivation-enhancing practices (e.g., pay raises, financial incentives, and opportunities for promotion). Group two consisted of 1,748 randomly selected employees who were asked to identify with statements such as “I plan to look for a job outside of this company in the next 6 months,” “I would turn down a job with more pay in order to stay with this company,” and “I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization.” Twelve months later the researchers collected data from company records related to employee departures and resurveyed group one, the group of managers. They were asked how many employees had quit or left the company voluntarily within the last year. Consistent with previous studies, results showed that employee retention was higher in units that were supervised by managers who used motivation-enhancing practices.

Routine Work Processes and Job Duties

When work processes and job duties in the Office of the Registrar become dull to employees who struggle to find motivation to complete them, the customers who are served by those tasks may notice. Office of the Registrar support staff frequently answer the same questions over and over again, questions such as “When can I enroll in classes?”, “How do I

order a transcript?”, and “How will you accept this transfer course?” When employees become tired of the repetitive nature of their work, they may be prone to performing only the minimum amount of work required instead of going the extra mile for customers. Seeking to identify specific aspects of front-line employees’ job characteristics that trigger boredom and how employees respond to boredom, Velasco (2017) used a mixed methods approach to collect data from 74 employees in a variety of service industries including banking, healthcare, retail, restaurants, hotels, museums, and universities. Convenience sampling resulted in 45% men and 55% women whose average age was 31. Interviews were conducted first, with participants asked to describe in detail a recent episode of boredom at work. Next, participants completed a questionnaire which asked about their perceived cause of the boredom episode, the working conditions surrounding the episode, and any perceived benefits to the boredom they experienced. Participants indicated that they “get bored with dull customers that do not understand what they have to do” and “when I see a large column of customers at the bank, I feel bored just thinking about the repetitive work I have to do for all of them” (Velasco, 2017, p. 285). Velasco (2017) coded interview responses into categories which included: skill variety (degree to which a variety of skills and talents are used), task identity (the ability to see outcomes), task significance (impact on others), autonomy (freedom of the employee to determine how to accomplish the task), and feedback (a review of the employee’s performance). Twenty-nine percent of participants indicated that lack of skill variety was the greatest contributor to workplace boredom. Regarding how participants responded to boredom, results indicated that only 33% of participants responded in a positive manner by looking for something work-related to do. The remaining 67% of participants reported that they disengaged from work by surfing the internet, ignoring supervisors and coworkers, or leaving the workplace without supervisor approval.

Velasco (2017) categorized these actions as counterproductive work behavior (CPWB). One type of CPWB relates to relationships with others; Velasco (2017) described interpersonal CPWB as “when feeling bored could be explained as having a feeling of torment that sparks resentment towards customers” (p. 287). Velasco (2017) concluded that relationships with customers can never be fully developed, or if already developed, deteriorate when employees become bored with their job duties. This study is relevant to the topic of motivation and Office of the Registrar support staff because it illustrates that it is possible to harness boredom in a positive way, although a small percentage of participants in Velasco’s (2017) study reported actually doing so. In the Office of the Registrar there is always work to be done. Leaders in the Office of the Registrar can remind bored employees to look for ways to contribute even when the tasks seem trivial, such as filing papers or updating policies and procedures manuals.

While much of the literature on motivation and boredom focuses on the outcomes of repeating the exact same task, Ayough, Zandieh, and Farsijani (2012) expanded the conceptualization of boredom to include tasks that are related in nature and require similar mental processes. Tasks can be classified into categories based on the type of machine or tools used, the procedures followed to carry out the task, an exposure to dangerous environments, the amount of precision desired, and the intensity of mental energy required (Ayough, Zandieh, & Farsijani, 2012). Job rotation is one of the strategies used to motivate employees assigned to repetitive tasks. While many organizations see other benefits of job rotation, such as producing multi-skilled and cross-trained workers, enhancing problem-solving skills, and increasing organizational knowledge, research has shown that job rotation is likely to gain no improvement with regard to individual employee performance (Ayough et al., 2012). Ayough et al. (2012) asserted that the lack of improvement stems from failing to consider the costs of boredom due to

the similarity of duties involved when developing job rotation programs. They proposed that managers make use of rotation programs which allow employees to perform a variety of tasks. Although this article focused on manufacturing technology, it is relevant to Office of the Registrar managers because as mentioned earlier, job rotation is an appealing strategy to keep job duties fresh and interesting for employees who perform routine tasks. However, by being aware that similar tasks can be equally as boring as repeating the exact same task, Office of the Registrar managers can avoid falling into the trap of rotating employees into other roles/tasks that truly offer no variety. For example, giving an employee who is responsible for updating address changes in the student information system the additional task of changing students' majors in the student information system involves the same type of work – data entry. Instead, printing diplomas and coordinating the distribution process would provide the employee with more variety.

Higher education is not the only field of work where employees may view their job duties as routine, dull, or uninteresting. Eberhardie (2006) reflected on her own 40-year career in nursing. She stressed that while nursing does indeed involve dramatic life-saving moments, the majority of her time was spent performing uneventful and routine tasks such as assessing patient needs, feeding and bathing patients, and making them comfortable. While she was unable to change the nature of the tasks she performed, she was able to view them through a different lens by changing her attitude. Rather than focusing on how she perceived the tasks, she focused on how the tasks were benefitting her patients. Eberhardie (2006) reported that when she switched to this servant mindset, her work became more rewarding and she felt more motivated to perform the tasks required for her job.

Gansemer-Topf, Von Haden, and Peggar's (2014) study involving admissions counselors shed light on how these individuals viewed their work, specifically their perspectives on their role in serving students and how their work benefitted students. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore which competencies and skills they viewed as essential for the job of admissions counselor. Gansemer-Topf et al. (2014) made use of listservs for several organizations, including the National Association for College Admissions Counseling (NACAC), the Iowa Association for College Admissions Counseling (Iowa ACAC), and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) to recruit 16 participants from a variety of institutional sizes and types. Interviews ranging from 20 – 30 minutes were conducted in person and by telephone, and Gansemer-Topf et al. (2014) then coded the data into categories. The theme of "advising and helping" emerged as one of the key competencies and skills. Although admissions staff may be considered to be in the business of "selling" the institution, participants in the study did not view themselves as salespeople or recruiters. Participants described themselves as a "counselor," "advisor," "coach," and "helper." This study is relevant to this research project because Office of the Registrar sometimes perform some of the same helping and advising tasks as admissions counselors, such as assisting students with transfer course evaluations and advising students on institutional policies and procedures. Office of the Registrar staff may see themselves as helpers and counselors as well, even though their formal titles and job descriptions may not explicitly reflect those roles. This helping viewpoint is one from which Brenda Barrows, a registrar, wrote about in an article regarding her pastoral approach. Barrows (2006) advised staff working in enrollment services to:

Above all, honor your responsibility to provide students clear and complete information about policies, courses, and the means to register. Never forget that the individuals you serve are people whose lives are connected to many others.

The better you serve students, the better you will serve the families and communities that support them (p. 449).

As mentioned earlier, although answering the same questions over and over again and repeating work tasks can lead to problems with motivation, staff who focus on the contributions that they are making by serving in a counselor, advisor, coach, or helper role may find their work to be more rewarding. When employees feel rewarded by the work that they perform, they most likely have no problems with motivation.

Motivation and the Work Environment

Seeking to understand differences related to employee engagement and motivation in the work environments of public and private institutions, Martin, Porter, and Tankersley (2016) collected data from 431 members of the Southern Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (SACRAO). A 13-question survey consisting of multiple choice, yes-no, and open-ended questions was disseminated to SACRAO members through the organization's listserv. Almost half (49%) of the participants reported their work unit as records/registrar, 22% reported working in enrollment services, 21% reported working in admissions, less than 1% reported working in information technology, and 7% reported working in some other unit. The majority of participants (57%) reported working at a public institution. Participants were asked "What motivates you in your role?" and more than half responded with "helping students." Employees at public institutions responded with "compensation" more frequently than employees at private institutions. Another question asked "Did you take at least one full week of vacation last year?" Most participants (38%) indicated yes but that they performed some type of work while on vacation; employees from private institutions were more likely to respond that they took one full week of vacation but that staff members in the office covered their responsibilities during that time. To the question of "Are you given recognition for your work?"

more than 70% of participants answered yes. Interestingly, employees at private institutions were more likely to receive recognition and praise by almost 10 percentage points. Participants were asked “Are you involved in decision-making that affects your work?” Although almost 90% responded yes, employees at private institutions reported more involvement with making decisions or setting policies than their counterparts at public institutions. Because employees at private institutions reported more involvement with decision-making, more recognition and praise, and that their colleagues handled job duties while on vacation, Martin, Porter, and Tankersley (2016) concluded that perhaps employees at private institutions are more close-knit or have a stronger sense of community within their work units.

Using focus groups comprised of Office of the Registrar support staff members from four institutions in the southeastern United States, Plemons (2014) studied the work environment and its influence on morale, a concept closely related to motivation. Results showed that participants viewed alternative work schedules, positive relationships with coworkers, and open communication as morale boosters. Additionally, Plemons (2014) sought to understand how morale impacted customer service and student retention. Participants were also asked how the level of morale in the office was related to carrying out the office mission. None of the participants were familiar with the office mission and therefore were unable to comment on how successful the office was at meeting its goals.

In a mixed methods study, Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, and Bennett (2006) examined the work environment of 70 student affairs administrators at 25 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Participants came from several functional areas which included admissions, advising, career services, counseling, student activities, and residence life. Two procedures were used to collect data. First, participants were asked to complete a survey

consisting of word pairs that describe the work environment (*practical/theoretical, service oriented/business oriented, highly professional/minimally professional, student centered/administrative centered, and highly bureaucratic/minimally bureaucratic*). Using a scale, participants were asked to rate the degree to which words best described their work environment. Second, participants discussed their responses in a focus group. Survey results showed that the work environments were practical, highly professional, student centered, and service oriented. In the focus group, participants used words such as “family oriented” and “like a really big family” (Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, & Bennett, 2006, p. 670). Furthermore, almost every participant mentioned that they were motivated by helping students. One participant described the motivation to help students:

My priority is to improve the quality of life for students here on campus. And so it's very important for me that I'm doing meaningful work. And in that effort, I'll be doing everything I can to make sure that they're using their leisure time as best they can, in constructive manners that will keep them out of trouble and doing something constructive and positive. Everything I do is based upon improving their lives (Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, & Bennett, 2006, p. 670).

In a study conducted outside of the field of higher education, Basford and Offermann (2012) explored the impact of peer coworker (non-supervisory) relationships on employee motivation by surveying 69,501 employees in a large US service-sector organization. Two statements were used to measure motivation: “This company motivates me to contribute more than is normally required to complete my work,” and “This company inspires me to do my best work every day.” Peer coworker (non-supervisory) relationships were measured by statements such as “My coworkers respect my thoughts and feelings,” and “My coworkers work well together to achieve our goals.” Additionally, the survey contained statements related to immediate supervisor support and senior management support. Results indicated that peer

coworker (non-supervisory) relationships had greater impacts on motivation than support from immediate supervisors and senior management.

Motivation and the Physical Work Environment

Johnson, Stoffan, and Carstens (2013) showed how powerful the physical work environment can be when it comes to employee motivation. Seeking to understand how institutions are striving to keep staff motivation high in the era of budget cuts and rising costs, Johnson et al. (2013) highlighted creative approaches used by leaders in Hunter Library at Western Carolina University (WCU) to empower employees. Although this study involves library staff, it is relevant to enrollment services staff as well who are experiencing the same budget woes and are looking for ways to keep employees happy and motivated. Compared to other work units on college campuses, Offices of the Registrar have especially been hit hard in recent years (Sauter & Shanken, 2015). Although improvements in technology are often seen as positive advancements, they have contributed to staff reductions and downsizing within the Office of the Registrar (Sauter & Shanken, 2015). Like many colleges and universities across the country in recent years, WCU has been feeling the effects of trying economic times. For several years, library employees saw no raises although costs for benefits such as health insurance increased. Positions were eliminated from the library, hiring freezes went into effect, and there were significant cuts to the collections and operating budgets. Because all of these responses to financial uncertainty have the potential to put a damper on employee motivation, it is imperative for Office of the Registrar leaders to find creative, low-cost ways to keep employees engaged and interested in their work as WCU has done. One such approach taken by Hunter Library leaders was to allow employees to exercise greater control over their physical work environment. As long as it is professionally done, employees may decorate their

workspaces as they choose. They are also free to configure desks, shared work tables, filing cabinets, and large office equipment such as copiers as they please as long as office functions and productivity are not hindered.

Johnson et al. also (2013) discussed how several years earlier a previous Hunter Library director, attempting to show appreciation for staff by updating worn and mismatched furniture in one wing of the library, purchased cubicles, desks, and chairs without consulting the employees who would be using them. Although the director had good intentions, the gesture had the opposite effect and motivation and morale declined. The design of the new cubicles did not give staff many options for the placement of computer monitors, keyboards, and other equipment. Several staff members experienced challenges with repetitive motion until they were able to make adjustments to their seating and equipment arrangement that was more ergonomic. According to Johnson et al. (2013), library leaders expressed plans to remodel the area again if the campus's financial situation improved. Library leaders indicated that any future remodeling plans would involve all staff whose workspaces would be affected by the change. Staff would be included in decisions regarding the type and arrangement of furniture to be purchased.

Leadership Styles and Strategies

Motivation can come from a variety of sources, and a great deal of the literature (Alward & Phelps, 2019; Gutierrez-Wirsching, Mayfield, J., Mayfield, M., & Wang, 2015; Rezvani, Khosravi, & Dong, 2017; Wu & Parker, 2017; Zareen, Razzaq, & Mujtaba, 2014) focuses on how leadership styles and strategies influence employee motivation. Researchers assert that managers should tailor their approaches to meet the needs and preferences of their staff. Strategies that successfully motivate one employee may prove to be ineffective for another employee. Managers should also understand that some employees are naturally self-starters

(intrinsically motivated) and need little or no motivation from other people while other employees require much more attention and effort by supervisors to ensure that they stay on task (extrinsically motivated).

Praise and Recognition

Workplace rewards can come in many forms, everything from casual dress days to extra time off. A survey of the literature reveals that recognition and praise are common and successful approaches used by managers and supervisors. Alward and Phelps (2019) interviewed 10 individuals in leadership roles at private colleges and universities in the United States regarding their use of recognition and praise. All of these individuals had at least 10 years of experience, at least a master's degree, and supervised a team of at least five employees. Several participants spoke of the importance of regularly praising and recognizing employees for a job well done: "Appreciation and acknowledgement is important for motivation; I recognize things like birthdays or work anniversaries" and "I try to motivate employees through personal contact with them; I give them encouragement and let them know they are doing a great job; a little Starbucks gift card out of the blue for doing something helps" (Alward & Phelps, 2019, p. 84). While praise can come in several forms, such as written, verbal, public, and private, leaders must be sensitive to how their employees prefer to be praised. Personality types who are social and enjoy the spotlight may be comfortable with praise in front of a large audience. Other individuals may prefer to be praised one-on-one with the supervisor or be given additional tasks or responsibilities. One participant elaborated on the importance of knowing how to tailor praise and recognition to the individual employee: "Some people are motivated by performance or positive feedback; give people a project to work on if they like that sort of thing" (Alward & Phelps, 2019, p. 84).

Incentive-Based Pay

Another type of reward frequently mentioned in the literature is incentive-based pay (Runes, Gerhart, & Parks, 2005; Stringer, Didham, & Theivananthampillai, 2011; Thibault Landry, Gagne, Forest, Guerrero, Seguin, & Papachristopoulos, 2017; Young, Beckman, & Baker, 2012). According to a recent article by The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), companies use a variety of financial incentives to motivate workers toward efficiency, productivity, and goal achievement. Profit-sharing plans are characterized by formulas that calculate how company profits are distributed among employees. Team/small-group incentives are smaller in scope and are given only to a few individuals who work together as a team. Spot awards are used to highlight extraordinary efforts while a project or task is underway. Workplaces also have several options for using bonuses as a reward for employee performance. With discretionary bonuses, organizational leaders determine the size of the bonus pool and how it will be allocated to employees. Discretionary bonuses do not make use of a predefined formula and are not guaranteed to employees. Retention bonuses are paid to retain individuals with highly specialized and/or in-demand skills during a particularly important business cycle. Project bonuses are given to individuals or work units for completing a project by a certain deadline.

Teleworking

Working from home or an alternate location such as a coffee shop or library (teleworking) is another type of reward used by supervisors to motivate employees. K. Waters (2014) discussed teleworking within the realm of higher education, specifically the positives and negatives associated with this arrangement and factors leaders in enrollment services should take into consideration before developing teleworking policies and programs. First, K. Waters (2014)

explained how higher education institutions can benefit financially from allowing employees to telework. Because many institutions across the country are looking for ways to “do more with less,” one approach to controlling costs while continuing to strive to offer high quality student services is allowing employees to telework. K. Waters (2014) asserted that because teleworking may contribute to a healthier workforce that suffers from less stress, institutions may notice savings with regard to health care. Because the flexibility to work wherever and whenever one wants may mean happy, loyal employees with little or no desire to voluntarily leave their employer, teleworking may also result in higher retention and lower training and recruitment costs. Second, K. Waters (2014) focused on how teleworking benefits employees. Working remotely reduces commute time and the amount of money spent on gasoline, parking, and automotive maintenance. Teleworking helps employees, especially those caring for children or aging relatives, to better meet work and family demands. Next, K. Waters (2014) discussed problems with and challenges to teleworking for both employers and employees. Although the benefits of telecommuting are numerous and significant, not every workplace, including higher education, has embraced this arrangement. According to K. Waters (2014), because not all positions, such as campus police, physical plant staff, and front desk staff in enrollment services units can be performed remotely, many workplaces do not have formal, company-wide policies regarding teleworking. Instead, the decision to allow teleworking and the responsibility for setting guidelines for this arrangement are left in the hands of individual supervisors, such as the campus registrar.

Although it would be difficult, if not impossible, for all Office of the Registrar staff to telework, specifically front-line staff whose primary role is to serve students face-to-face, positions responsible for work behind the scenes, such as compliance coordinator, associate

registrar, assistant registrar, systems analyst, report writer, and programmer may be able to perform their duties from a remote location. Therefore, at some point a registrar may be faced with how to handle requests from employees to telework. K. Waters (2014) stressed that managers should take several factors into consideration: communication, management, and trust. The manager and employee must agree upfront on the methods of communication (email, group chat, telephone, instant message, video conferencing, or text) and the frequency of communication. Managers should also realize that the supervision of teleworkers must be intentional and involved; guidelines, milestones, objectives, and goals must be clearly stated (K. Waters, 2014). It is crucial for both the manager and the employee to trust each other. The manager should be confident that the employee is self-disciplined, communicates effectively, and is able to work independently. The employee must be confident that the manager will clearly state expectations, provide support, and empower them to make decisions.

New Employee Orientation

Numerous research studies (Beenen, Pichler, & Levy, 2016; Cable, 2013; Milligan, Margaryan, & Littlejohn, 2013; Pandey, Schulz, & Camp, 2018; Rabel & Stefaniak, 2018; Yamamura, Birk, & Cossitt, 2010) have focused on the relationship between leadership during the onboarding process for new employees and motivation. Although a thorough onboarding process is vital for motivating new hires, too often leaders forget about or give little attention to employee orientation. New employees who are not onboarded properly may feel lost, confused, or isolated and therefore experience problems with motivation. Because employees' first impressions of their new work environment often set the tone for their attitudes and behavior, leaders should take advantage of the chance to acquaint them with the organization in a way that will earn their loyalty. There are many ways for leaders to be proactive in ensuring that their

new employees feel welcomed and supported from the get-go, such as maintaining an open-door policy and meeting regularly with new employees to discuss their progress. Lewis Miller, Grooms, and King (2018) described a creative approach used by leaders of the information and technologies (IT) service desk at a medium-sized, public, comprehensive university in the Midwest to introduce new hires to the university. Incorporating the trend of gamification, the IT service desk managers created an online training course consisting of seven modules that made use of a leaderboard (scoreboard that indicated where a player fell in relation to other players), leveling up (increase in rank as points were earned), and bonus prizes and challenges tied together by a space exploration theme. Lewis Miller et al. (2018) defined gamification as the “application of game techniques and strategies to a process or environment that is typically non-gaming, like shopping, exercising, or teaching and learning” (p. 249). To assess the gamification approach, the researchers used an anonymous survey given at the end of the last training module. Responses to the survey questions revealed that the majority of participants felt that the game provided tools that could be applied to their jobs, that gamification made their experience fun and engaging, and that they had ample opportunity to ask questions and receive feedback. Office of the Registrar staff most likely do not have the time or technical skillsets to develop online training modules, but similar less-elaborate game-like approaches could be implemented for new employee training.

Personal Characteristics

A large number of studies (Diskiene, Pauliene, & Ramanauskaite, 2019; Fiaz, Su, Amir, & Saqib, 2017; Nielsen, Boye, Holten, Jacobsen, & Andersen, 2019) have explored how leaders’ personal characteristics, behavior, and traits play a part in motivating employees. Webb (2007) examined the relationship between the leadership of college and university presidents and

chancellors and factors that motivate employees to go beyond expectations by surveying 223 vice presidents and chief officers from 104 institutions affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). Participants were chosen through network sampling. The sample consisted of individuals working in the areas of academic affairs, student affairs, and business affairs at small institutions (no more than 10,000 students); 82% were men and 18% were women; and the average age was 50. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) measured the leadership styles of presidents, job satisfaction, perceptions of leadership effectiveness, and employee motivation. The independent variables were transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles and the dependent variable was motivation toward extra effort. Multiple regression models were used to analyze the data. Results indicated that these high-ranking individuals were motivated to make an extra effort when the institution's president or chancellor modelled self-confidence, high energy, personal conviction, power, and assertiveness. Other behaviors by the president or chancellor that motivated employees to perform above and beyond included taking others' needs into consideration and showing appreciation (Webb, 2007). Although this study involved presidents and chancellors, it can be applied to the Office of the Registrar. Office of the Registrar leaders can convey (or develop if lacking) all of the traits Webb (2007) showed in the study that were found to motivate employees to go the extra mile.

Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2006) used face-to-face interviews to examine the emerging concept of employee spirit, which is defined as the belief that one's work makes a contribution to the organization and its success, feeling a connection with coworkers, seeing a common purpose in the work that is performed by all individuals in the organization, and a sense of well-being. Network and purposive sampling resulted in 13 individuals with ages ranging from 26 to 81 who

worked full-time in a variety of occupations (including higher education) and self-identified high levels of spirit at work. Participants were asked to describe their work, how often they experienced spirit at work, a recent experience of feeling alive, involved, and excited about their work, and the work conditions/factors surrounding this experience. Responses regarding work conditions/factors were grouped into seven emergent themes: inspiring leadership and mentorship, strong organizational foundation, organizational integrity, positive workplace culture and space, sense of community among members, opportunities for personal fulfilment, continuous learning and development, and appreciation and regard for employees and their contribution. Although these work conditions/factors contributed to spirit at work, inspiring leadership appeared to be the foundation that supported the remaining six conditions/factors. Participants described inspiring leaders as a source of motivation because they created a caring culture and modeled behaviors that mirrored the organization's mission (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2006).

Other Leadership Skills

Bunis (2006) discussed leadership qualities that collegiate registrars should possess. First, registrars must be able to delegate. Because the amount of the work performed within the Office of the Registrar is vast and critical to the success of the institution, one person cannot do it all. A registrar must be able to trust the team. However, Bunis (2006) cautioned registrars to be sure *before* delegating tasks that staff members know how to perform them and are capable of performing them. Delegation, according to Bunis (2006), can have an impact on employee motivation. If a staff member is delegated duties that are unfamiliar and not given adequate guidance or support, performance is at risk for falling below the desired standards of a trained, experienced employee. Poor performance can lead to loss of confidence and low levels of

motivation. On the other hand, providing too much support and guidance (micromanaging) to highly motivated, competent staff may be viewed as offensive. These staff members may become resentful of the manager, lose trust in the manager, and begin to experience problems with motivation. Second, Bunis (2006) described the importance for registrars to be able to align staff development opportunities with the interests and strengths of their employees. Bunis (2006) very briefly discussed three case studies involving unmotivated employees and how a university registrar was able to improve their levels of motivation. After holding private, candid, individual meetings with the three unmotivated employees to ask about their interests, strengths, and career goals, the registrar was able to move one employee into a newly created position, promote one employee into an open position, and shifted one employee's job duties.

Inspired by Bunis (2006), M. Waters and Hightower (2016) sought to describe the management and leadership role of the registrar as perceived by registrars and institutional leaders. Network and snowball sampling were used to select participants from seven institutions in California. The sample consisted of leaders from private, not-for-profit, mid-sized, four-year institutions. A combination of telephone and in-person semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 individuals who held the role of senior administrator (chief academic officers, chief enrollment officers, and senior advisors for strategy and planning), faculty leader (leaders in faculty governance, academic program directors, and members of academic committees), and registrar. Participants were asked to describe their experiences and opinions regarding the registrar's role within the administrative structure of a college or university (Waters, M. & Hightower, 2016). Interview responses were coded into two broad categories: perceptions of the registrar's role and skills considered important to the registrar's role. Although all participants viewed the registrar as a manager and leader within the Office of the Registrar, there was

disagreement on the registrar's role as an institutional leader. Participants further elaborated on factors they perceived as hindering the registrar's ability to be a campus leader. These factors included the lack of respect from faculty, the absence of support from senior administrators, and the primary responsibility of registrars to manage the day-to-day functions of their office. Interestingly, half of the participants indicated that registrars do not always possess effective leadership skills that would allow them to effectively lead at the institutional level. Regarding skills important to the registrar's role, participants frequently mentioned that registrars must be competent in delegating important tasks to their staff, recognizing talent in their employees, and aligning job duties to capitalize on these talents. These traits, as previously discussed by Bunis (2006), can influence the motivation levels of employees.

Staffing the Office, Organizing the Office, and Managing Operations

Seeking to identify efficient organizational structures and ways to operate, Pace (2011), the registrar at the University of Notre Dame, sought input from well-respected, innovative, and distinguished registrars and enrollment managers across the country. A network sample yielded 12 participants who were employed at medium and large public and private institutions. All participants had at least 15 years of higher education experience. Before telephone interviews were conducted, Pace (2011) emailed the following prompt to participants:

Suppose that you were able to completely start over...with a blank slate and all the funds and space you needed...with no obstacles...

1. What would the staff/services/responsibilities that you would develop look like?
2. When staffing this imaginary office or the new areas you foresee, what requirements would you place upon their hiring?

3. What talents do you need in staff who fill the positions?

Regarding desired qualifications for Office of the Registrar staff, participants showed preference for individuals with at least a bachelor's degree, strong technical, interpersonal, and communication skills, and the capability to engage in institution-wide planning and strategy. With regard to organization of the office, participants indicated that they would be more intentional with cross-training and outsource routine tasks such as transcript processing and mailing, address changes, and enrollment verifications. Participants also spoke at length about their ideal way of operating: staff would be selected for projects based on their fit for the tasks involved rather than their job duties and title, and that they would upgrade front-line, entry level positions from "mere processors" to higher skilled "analysts" (Pace, 2011, p. 5).

Summary

While not exhaustive, this chapter has focused on factors shown to affect workplace motivation as documented in the literature. Research has consistently shown that recognition, praise, incentive-based pay, a leader's personal characteristics, and routine office processes all influence employee motivation, either positively or negatively. Although scarce, emphasis was placed on reviewing literature related to staff in higher education as part of a foundation for this study. Now that a foundation has been established from the literature, the research methodology is described in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how job duties, work processes, elements of the work environment, and leadership styles are related to employee motivation, specifically the motivation of support staff who work in the Office of the Registrar. Additionally, I aimed to identify any disconnect between what support staff need and want from supervisors in the Office of the Registrar pertaining to motivation and what supervisors are actually doing to encourage high levels of motivation. In seeking to understand this phenomenon, this study addressed several research questions:

1. How do participants describe their personal motivation level, the motivation levels of their coworkers, and the motivation levels of their support staff?
2. How do participants view the job duties/work processes they (or their support staff) perform in relation to motivation?
3. How do participants view elements of the work environment (compensation, financial incentives, relationships, recognition, etc.) in relation to motivation?
4. How do participants view leadership styles and behaviors in relation to motivation?

The overarching researching question guiding the study is: What motivates support staff in the Office of the Registrar?

This chapter will describe the study's research methodology, specifically the following aspects: rationale for qualitative research design, rationale for multicase study methodology, selection of research participants, proposal and IRB approval, data collection methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, and validity. The chapter closes with a brief summary.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

The literature review in Chapter 2 revealed that researchers have studied the topic of motivation by using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches. A careful examination of each type of research design was conducted before the decision was made to conduct this study qualitatively. The rationale for this choice becomes evident through a brief review of qualitative research.

Qualitative research encompasses a diverse group of approaches used by a growing number of researchers from disciplines such as sociology, education, psychology, business, health professions, and anthropology. Qualitative research, according to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), emerged when researchers in the early twentieth century began to seek understanding of human knowledge, perspective, behavior, and experience rather than objective “truth” or “reality.” Merriam and Tisdell (2016) distinguished qualitative research from quantitative research by stating that “rather than determining cause and effect, predicting, or describing the distribution of some attribute among a population,” qualitative research allows the researcher to uncover and understand the meaning of a phenomenon to those individuals who experience the phenomenon (p. 5).

Definitions of qualitative research are numerous and diverse. A commonly cited definition comes from Denzin and Lincoln (2011):

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Although qualitative inquiry provides insights into phenomena that quantitative research cannot, qualitative methods should only be used when it is a good fit for the research problem, situation, topic, and researcher's needs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Patton (2002) stated that qualitative methods are appropriate when the researcher seeks an in-depth, detailed understanding. This in-depth, detailed understanding can only be achieved through qualitative methods (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research was chosen for this study because of my interest in achieving a "complex, detailed understanding" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 40) of leadership traits and strategies of collegiate registrars and their impact on the motivation levels of front line support staff within the office. As mentioned earlier, research into this phenomenon is extremely limited. Therefore, by seeking to provide this "complex, detailed understanding" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 40) of the issue in this qualitative study, I hope that this study will be the first step toward filling the gap in the literature.

Compared with quantitative methods, which involve standardized measures that force multiple diverse perspectives into "a limited number of predetermined response categories," the depth, richness, and detail of qualitative studies is the product of approaching data collection without any preconceived themes or categories into which data collected will be grouped (Patton, 2002, p. 14). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research may lead researchers in an unexpected direction (Patton, 2002). Qualitative studies are more flexible than quantitative studies, Patton (2002) continued, and are appropriate when qualitative researchers are open to the opportunity to be "led by," "guided," and "directed" by the data as it is collected. Unstructured interviews, and semi-structured interviews to a certain extent, provide such an opportunity for the researcher to go with the flow and follow whatever direction the research takes them.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research provides an opportunity for individuals to tell their own stories using their own words. Participants in this study were asked to describe their job duties, their workplace, their coworkers, and how their supervisor performs as a leader. Additional questions focused on participants' perceptions of how the work environment and their supervisor affects their levels of motivation as well as their coworkers' motivation levels. Ensuring that perspectives are accurately represented is important to qualitative researchers, especially for topics and populations that are underrepresented in academic studies.

Rationale for Multicase Study Methodology

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed five main approaches to qualitative research: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. This study employed the case study approach, specifically a multiple case study approach involving two higher education institutions. The rationale for the case study approach becomes evident after a brief review of the approach.

According to Yin (1994) "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenology and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Creswell and Poth (2018) defined case study research as:

a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observation, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (pp. 96 – 97)

Although most scholars agree on the characteristics of a case study, that it is bounded, detailed, in-depth, and involves multiple sources of information, there is disagreement on what

exactly constitutes a case study. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed the different views of case study research. The first view is that the term “case study” refers to the situation or instance that is being studied, which could be “a single person who is a case example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 38). The “what” or the “who” that is being studied, known as the unit of analysis, is the focus of the study rather than the topic of investigation. In a second view, as mentioned earlier, a case study is considered as a research approach. Compared with the first view of a case study, this view focuses on what the researcher does and how it is done (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Scholars who subscribe to a third view see a case study as the final written product of a qualitative study regardless of which research approach was used (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) proposed a fourth view: all of these views put together is the correct viewpoint. As suggested by Savin-Baden and Major (2013), this study incorporated all three views of case study research.

Before deciding on the procedures used in a case study, the researcher should examine the intent of the case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) described the various types of case studies based on purpose. Case studies conducted in order to spotlight a unique or unusual case are intrinsic cases. According to Yin (1994), case studies in which researchers conduct fieldwork and gather data before developing research questions are exploratory case studies. Yin (1994) also described evaluative case studies as studies that are used to judge the effectiveness, worth, or merit of a case. The intent of a descriptive case study is to produce a detailed account of the topic without using theory to guide the research or draw conclusions drawn from the data collected (Yin, 1994). Finally, instrumental cases are conducted where there is a need for more understanding of an issue, problem, or phenomenon.

Stake (2006) wrote that with instrumental case studies, researchers expand upon or refine an existing theory about the topic of the study. Because two theories, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory, guided this research, an instrumental case study best describes this study.

Multiple case research, or multicase research as it will be referred to in this study, is "a special effort to examine something having lots of cases, parts, or members" (Stake, 2006, p. vi). In this multicase study, I examined two individual cases with the same research questions guiding the study. Involving multiple cases in a study often allows the researcher to highlight different perspectives on the topic (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Multicase research allows for various organizations, places, sites, or settings to be described individually before any broad conclusions are drawn regarding the research topic (Patton, 2002). Although multicase research allows each case's own story to be told, "the official interest is in the collection of these cases or in the phenomenon exhibited in those cases" (Stake, 2006, p. vi). A multiple case approach was used for this study because although the individual experiences and perceptions of Office of the Registrar support staff was of interest, the focus of this research was to examine efforts by supervisors within the office to encourage and maintain high levels of motivation. A multiple case approach is appropriate, according to Stake (2006), when the objective is to "understand more thoroughly" and the researcher chooses to study the phenomenon "through its cases, by means of a multicase study" (p. vi).

Selection of Research Participants

As mentioned previously, the two institutions selected for the study were regional, non-system affiliated, four-year, regionally accredited, public institutions located in the Four State Area of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. The institutions involved with the study

were given the pseudonyms of ABC University and XYZ University. ABC University and XYZ University are located in different states. Only institutions with a small to medium size student body (no more than 10,000 students) were considered for the study. A review of institutional data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of colleges and universities in these four states revealed that based on data from the Fall 2018 semester, 13 institutions met the criteria for involvement in the study. The institution where I am employed, Missouri Southern State University (MSSU), was removed from consideration. This resulted in 12 institutions from which to draw potential participants. As I was the only researcher involved in conducting interviews and performing document analysis, to make it feasible for these goals to be achieved, the number and type of institutions from which to select participants was further narrowed down from 12 to two.

Using the list from NCES of 12 colleges and universities that fit the criteria for this study, I began the recruitment process by placing a telephone call to the registrar at each of the 12 eligible institutions. I introduced myself, briefly explained the study, and asked for permission to email an invitation directly to potential participants. In this email (Appendix B), I explained the purpose of the study, how the study would be conducted, and formally invited the registrar and their support staff members to participate. A follow up email (Appendix C) was sent if no response was received after one week. Convenience sampling was used to narrow down the institutions that were involved with the study. More than two institutions agreed to participate, so I randomly selected the two institutions for the study. I emailed the registrars at the institutions not chosen. In this email, I thanked the registrars for their interest in the study and explained that although their involvement in the study was not needed at that time, I considered their institutions as backups in the event of any issues with the institutions that were chosen for

the study. I then notified selected participants by email (Appendix D). I again mentioned the purpose of the study, provided more details on the semi-structured one-on-one recorded interviews, and asked that the participants contact me with any preliminary questions that they might have had.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), there is no standard sample size for qualitative research. Researchers should sample until data saturation is reached, which means that participants are not providing additional information or insights into the research problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data saturation was most likely not obtained in this study due to the small number of potential participants that met the narrow search criteria. For this study, six individuals were involved. Two registrars, one from each institution, and four support staff members participated in this study. All participants were female and ages ranged from twenty to sixty. Five participants were White and one participant was Black. Job titles for the support staff members were slightly altered to protect confidentiality. The lone support staff participant from ABC University held the title of records specialist. Support staff participants from XYZ University held the titles of transcript specialist, enrollment specialist, and academic services specialist.

As Creswell and Poth (2018) described, securing participation might be a challenge in qualitative research. I anticipated that potential participants might have been reluctant to participate in the study due to time constraints, the lack of an existing relationship with me, the absence of an understanding of qualitative research and how it contributes to scholarly study and the body of knowledge, or concerns about voicing their thoughts and opinions regarding the work environment, job duties, and supervisor. Therefore, I strove to proactively minimize any hesitancy felt by potential participants by working to establish rapport. Rapport can be

established, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), by being open and honest with participants regarding the nature and purpose of the research being conducted and reassuring them of anonymity if requested or promised. Patton (2002) wrote that other methods for establishing rapport include representing people the way they want to be represented and capturing their perspectives in their own words. I explained to participants during the recruitment process, before each interview, and after each interview that they would be given the opportunity to review transcribed interviews for accuracy and request that I make any changes.

Proposal and IRB Approval

After the successful development and defense of the proposal for this study, which included background information on the topic, a problem statement, statement of purpose, research questions, limitations and underlying assumptions, a review of related literature, and the proposed methodological approach, this study was immediately submitted for review by the IRB. IRB approval (Appendix A) was obtained prior to the recruitment of participants and data collection.

Data Collection Methods

Case study researchers have at their disposal “multiple sources and techniques” to use in the data gathering process (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 164). These sources and techniques, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), include “observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports” (pp. 96 - 97). As previously mentioned, two methods were used to collect data for this study. Interviews served as the primary method for data collection and document analysis was also used.

Case studies, according to Patton (2002), “open up a world to the reader through rich, detailed, and concrete descriptions of people and places” (p. 438). These descriptions result

from a “complex, detailed understanding” of individuals’ perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 40). The views of individuals often differ. Therefore, in order to thoroughly and accurately represent the case, researchers must strive to capture multiple views of the case (Stake, 1995). In this study, data were collected from two cases (or institutions), two registrars, and four support staff members. By including registrars and their support staff, and by utilizing a multicase approach, multiple views of each case are represented.

Interviews

Interviews were one-on-one, conducted virtually through the Zoom platform, and semi-structured. With semi-structured interviews, according to Patton (2002), the researcher has a list of questions, topics, or subjects but:

is free to explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject. Thus, the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined. (p. 343)

The use of a semi-structured approach for this study provided opportunities for support staff to elaborate on responses regarding what motivates them, and for registrars, provided opportunities to elaborate on responses regarding strategies for motivating their staff.

Although semi-structured interviews allow for some flexibility and freedom, I strove to ensure that the conversation stayed focused on the research questions. In order to support this goal, two interview guides were written during the proposal stage: an interview guide for Office of the Registrar supervisors (Appendix E) and an interview guide for support staff (Appendix F). Interview questions were designed with the conceptual framework in mind and pertained to Maslow’s (1954) five levels of needs. The first level, physiological needs, includes basic human needs such as food, water, and sleep (Maslow, 1954). An interview question related to physiological needs centered on participants’ motivation levels during office peak times. This

question was designed to elicit responses regarding how participants took care of their physical, mental, and emotional needs during busy times (i.e., if they were taking time during the day for a full lunch break and if they got enough sleep at night). The second level, safety needs, involves financial security (Maslow, 1954). Several interview questions pertaining to financial compensation, bonuses, and raises were included on the interview guide. The next level, love and belonging needs, include social needs such as friendships and a sense of connectedness with others (Maslow, 1954). Interview questions centered on relationships and teamwork. The fourth level, esteem needs, includes recognition and respect (Maslow, 1954). Interview questions focused on recognition, praise, and feedback in the workplace. Finally, Maslow's (1954) highest level, self-actualization, involves the realization of a person's potential, self-fulfillment, personal growth, and peak experiences. Interview questions pertaining to this level centered on professional development opportunities, cross-training opportunities, and feelings of connection to the office's mission. Additionally, interview questions were guided by Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory. Similar to Herzberg's (1966) study, several interview questions centered on what participants liked and disliked about their jobs and their workplaces. Interview questions were written to identify the specific job duties and tasks that contributed to both high and low motivation levels. Interview questions were included in the study that pertained to elements of the work environment (compensation, financial incentives, relationships, recognition, etc.) and how those elements influenced motivation levels.

The timeframe for all interviews and document analysis was December 2020 and January 2021. Participants at both institutions were consulted before the final dates and times were scheduled for interviews to ensure that the study would not interfere with the daily activities of the Office of the Registrar and the institutions as a whole.

Although I had originally planned to travel to each campus to conduct in-person interviews, that was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Three participants (both participants from ABC University and one from XYZ University) were physically on their campuses for the Zoom interviews, and the other three participants (all from XYZ University) interviewed from their homes as they were working remotely at the time. As Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested, I confirmed with each participant before beginning interviews that the location was private and free of any possible distractions.

I followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation and reviewed participants' rights with each participant immediately before the start of each interview. Also, all participants sent a signed consent form to me by email before their interviews. Prior to the start of each interview, participants were asked again to consent to the study and to the recording. Efforts to maintain participant confidentiality were discussed again, as well as the right to not answer questions or to stop the interview at any time.

Interviews with ABC University staff were conducted in December 2020 (Table 1) using the Zoom video conferencing platform. I conducted one 47-minute interview with Amanda, the registrar, and used the Interview Guide (Supervisors) (Appendix E) to guide the conversation. Amanda participated in the interview from her private office at ABC University. Four support staff members were invited to participate in the study but only one, Danielle, responded to my email requests. The Interview Guide (Staff) (Appendix F) was used for Danielle's interview. Although she did not have a private office of her own, she made arrangements in advance to find a private space on campus for the interview. The interview with Danielle lasted 44 minutes. As previously mentioned, Danielle's job title was records specialist. The interviews with Amanda and Danielle resulted in 31 double-spaced pages of transcripts that were used for analysis.

Table 1

Interviews with ABC University registrar (Amanda) and support staff

| <u>Interview</u> | <u>Date</u> | <u>Time</u> | <u>Duration</u> | <u>Transcript Pgs</u> |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Amanda | 12/21/2020 | 1:07 p.m. | 47 min. | 16 |
| Danielle | 12/04/2020 | 10:00 a.m. | 44 min. | 15 |

Interviews with XYZ University staff were conducted via Zoom in January 2021 (Table 2). The registrar, Jennifer, participated in one 47-minute interview. The Interview Guide (Supervisors) (Appendix E) steered the conversation. Jennifer participated in the interview from her home. Four support staff members were invited to participate and three accepted. The Interview Guide (Staff) (Appendix F) was used. Participants from XYZ University held the title of transcript specialist, enrollment specialist, and academic services specialist. One participant, Margo, interviewed from her private office on campus; the other participants were located in their homes during their interviews. The interviews with support staff ranged from 42 to 49 minutes in length. The interviews with Jennifer and her support staff resulted in 69 double-spaced pages of transcripts that were used for analysis.

Table 2

Interviews with XYZ University registrar (Jennifer) and support staff

| <u>Interview</u> | <u>Date</u> | <u>Time</u> | <u>Duration</u> | <u>Transcript Pgs</u> |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Jennifer | 01/20/2021 | 2:00 p.m. | 47 min. | 18 |
| Margo | 01/15/2021 | 10:00 a.m. | 49 min. | 18 |
| Erica | 01/19/2021 | 11:00 a.m. | 42 min. | 18 |
| Cindy | 01/21/2021 | 11:00 a.m. | 46 min. | 15 |

All interviews were recorded electronically through my personal password protected Zoom account, and as a backup, a digital audio recording device. In addition, I followed Savin-Baden and Major's (2013) advice to make handwritten notes during each interview. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) pointed out several benefits to handwritten notes: they can help the interviewer in remembering their reactions to something the participant said, allow the interviewer to pace the interview, and serve as a reassuring signal to the participant that they are providing valuable, relevant information.

Although a combination of interviews and document analysis was used for this study, the primary method of collecting data was the interviews. Therefore, accurately capturing the thoughts and meanings of the participants as they described them was a concern. All interviews were personally transcribed by me; I used a computer, word processing program, and the recorded interviews from the Zoom platform. This process generated a total of 100 double-spaced pages of interview transcripts. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested, after all interviews were transcribed I emailed transcripts to the participants for review. None of the participants requested that I make any changes or corrections.

Document Analysis

The second method of data collection for this study was document analysis. Each participant, including the registrars taking part in the study, was asked to provide at least one document for me to review. I emphasized to the participants that the documents should provide additional or supporting information about the registrars' leadership traits and strategies related to motivation. Participants were encouraged to submit documents from a variety of sources, such as emails, handwritten thank you cards, or meeting minutes. In lieu of documents, I also allowed participants to provide artifacts, such as signs, trophies, or plaques that could be

evidence of how the registrar motivates entry level staff within the office. Although I had originally proposed to conduct the document analysis in person, that was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Study participants either attached the document to an email or took a photograph of the artifact and sent it to me by email.

Data Analysis

Since data collection and analysis is “interrelated” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 185) and a “simultaneous process” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p. 195), I began to look for emergent themes and categories in which to organize the data as soon as the collection process began. My first impressions of the participants, my ongoing observations during the study, and analysis conducted after fieldwork had concluded were all included in my evaluation and categorization of information.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018) researchers have several options for analyzing case study data. First, in single case studies, multiple units within the case (e.g., the registration team, the room scheduling team, or the degree audit team in the Office of the Registrar) can be analyzed individually. By drilling down through the organizational layers of a case, this option allows the researcher to compare and contrast these subgroups. Second, data from the single case (e.g., the Office of the Registrar) involved in the study can be evaluated as a whole, regardless of any teams, subgroups, units, or departments that may comprise the case.

Compared to single case studies, researchers using a multicase study approach have greater flexibility in analyzing data. First, data from multiple units within all cases in the study, or from only a select group of cases in the study, can be compared and contrasted. Second, in a broader sense, data from each case involved in the study can be compared and contrasted. Since the support staff members involved with this study came from several subgroups within the

Office of the Registrar, and because the small number of participants prevented adequate representation from all subgroups, I was not able to analyze the data based on subgroup affiliation.

Prior to the coding process, interview transcripts were provided to the participants for review. As suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), I attempted to learn as much as possible about each document and/or artifact provided by participants: its origin, authenticity, accuracy, history, purpose, and creator. Transcripts, documents, and artifacts were briefly evaluated using content analysis in order to create basic descriptive categories to aid in the coding stage. Content analysis, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), is frequently used to analyze patterns, purposes, meanings, and messages and may be quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative content analysis involves the frequency and amount of a certain word or phrase (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative content analysis, the researcher examines the context and relationships of certain words or phrases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After a brief, initial review of each piece of data, I made the decision to use the qualitative approach.

During the coding process the researcher breaks down the data that has been collected into single units, evaluates each unit for meaning, and assigns a word or phrase (a code) that reflects the essence of the unit (Saldana, 2016). Coding, according to Saldana (2016), allows the researcher to “organize and group similarly coded data into categories or ‘families’ because they share some characteristic – the beginning of a pattern” (p. 10).

Qualitative researchers have a large number of options from which to choose for coding data. A single method may be used or multiple methods can be used (Saldana, 2016). Saldana (2016) stressed that there is no right or wrong choice; the decision on which method is the best method can only be made by the researcher conducting the study. Saldana (2016) also

commented on the flexibility researchers have when coding data. If the researcher finds that the chosen method is not allowing many codes or categories to emerge, the researcher can switch to a different method. I used two first-cycle coding methods: descriptive coding and in vivo coding.

Descriptive coding, according to Saldana (2016), is appropriate for beginning qualitative researchers, particularly those whose studies involve multiple forms of data (e.g., interview transcripts, field notes from observations, and documents). Saldana (2016) defined descriptive coding as the summary of “a word or short phrase – most often a noun” that captures “the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 102). Descriptive coding is an important step that should be performed early in the coding process, as it essentially forms a summary of what is in the transcript or text (Saldana, 2016). Furthermore, descriptive coding aids the researcher in forming a foundation for categories or themes that are likely to emerge later in the coding process (Saldana, 2016).

Saldana (2016) cautioned that researchers should not solely rely on descriptive coding. Other methods are able to go beyond simple descriptive nouns and provide greater insight into the data, specifically the experiences and perceptions of the study’s participants (Saldana, 2016). Accordingly, in vivo coding was used for this study, which as Saldana (2016) advised, is appropriate for “studies that prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (p. 106). With in vivo coding, the researcher uses the participants’ own words or phrases found in the transcript, document, or observational narrative to categorize them (Saldana, 2016). Using codes that are “participant-inspired” rather than “researcher-generated” fosters the development of rich, thick descriptions of the categories and emergent themes (Saldana, 2016).

Since first-cycle coding yielded a large number of codes, some of which were similar, I performed second-cycle coding as Saldana (2016) suggested. Second-cycle coding involves condensing first-cycle codes into “a smaller and more select list of broader categories, themes, concepts, and/or assertions” (Saldana, 2016, p. 234). The specific type of second-cycle coding used was pattern coding.

Ethical Considerations

Because ethical issues can arise at any stage in the research process, ethical considerations must be at the forefront of the researcher’s mind at all times (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is imperative for the researcher to take proactive steps to protect the participants involved with the study, be aware of and strive to minimize researcher bias, and take appropriate measures to safeguard the data collected. Ethical considerations are evident in this study.

Human Participants

As mentioned earlier, a signed consent form was obtained from all participants prior to the data collection process. Two versions of the consent form was used: one version for supervisors (Appendix G) and one version for entry level staff (Appendix H). As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018), both versions of the consent form explained the confidentiality of the study and the efforts that would be made to protect the identity of the participants. Additionally, the consent form explained the purpose of the study, outlined the procedures for data collection, emphasized to participants that their involvement was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time at their request, informed participants that they would receive no compensation for their involvement, and notified participants that there were no foreseeable risks involved with the study. Prior to each interview, I confirmed with the participant that they had a copy of their signed consent form.

Researcher Bias

Reducing researcher bias should also be a goal in qualitative studies (Patton, 2002; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Because the researcher plays an integral role in qualitative studies by serving as the instrument for data collection and interpreting responses, there is a risk that the researcher's biases can unintentionally and unknowingly affect the study (Patton, 2002). For this study, I examined my role as an assistant registrar and my many years of employment within the Office of the Registrar. There was a possibility that my professional title of assistant registrar and position on the organizational chart might have intimidated the support staff participants in this study, and therefore, hindered their ability to openly express themselves. However, this risk might have been mitigated by my many years of experience working in the Office of the Registrar. I hoped that the participants would view me as an insider who is intimately familiar with the work they perform on a daily basis. Viewing me as an insider might have made the participants feel comfortable with me and the study, and as a result, allowed them to be forthcoming with their responses.

Data Storage

I followed Rubin and Rubin's (2012) suggestions for storing the data collected for this study. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the confidentiality of all participants. The two institutions where the participants work were assigned the pseudonyms of ABC University and XYZ University. Any personally identifying information, including downloaded Zoom interviews and a table of participants' real names and their pseudonyms, was kept electronically on a flash drive as password protected files that only I could access. Furthermore, the table of names and pseudonyms was stored on a separate flash drive from other files related to this study.

Validity

Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined several perspectives that researchers have adopted that seek to explain the quantitative term “validity” as it relates to qualitative research. There is no standard terminology used among researchers; Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that terms such as credibility, transferability, authenticity, objectivity, dependability, validation, integrity, and confirmability are all used. Regardless of word choice, the intent is to determine if the researcher accurately captured the experiences and perspectives of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I employed several strategies suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018) to ensure the validity of the study. First, evidence collected was corroborated through triangulation of multiple data sources. As previously discussed, this study will incorporate two methods of data collection: interviews and document analysis. Second, as discussed earlier, I sought feedback from the participants by asking them to review interview transcripts for accuracy. Third, I spent as much time as possible to ensure that the participants understood the study’s purpose and goals, to build relationships with the participants, and to put the participants at ease. Fourth, I sought to produce a rich, thick description of the participants under study. The phrase “rich, thick description” has evolved as qualitative research has evolved. Originally, the phrase referred to the account of the observer or insider, however in more recent years the phrase means:

a highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting...and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 257).

Providing rich, thick descriptions assists readers in making decisions regarding the transferability of the study’s findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The findings from this study may be relevant to the Office of the Registrar at any college or university campus because of their shared

responsibilities and mission. Finally, in order to strengthen “the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings,” multiple cases were involved with the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 40).

Summary

This chapter described the rationale for qualitative research design, the rationale for multicase study methodology, the selection of research participants, the proposal and IRB approval process, data collection methods, data analysis, ethical considerations, and validity. A qualitative approach was taken because of my desire to obtain a “complex, detailed understanding” of the phenomenon. To highlight different perspectives of the phenomenon, I included multiple cases. Two institutions and six individuals were involved in the study. Data was collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews and documents provided by participants. I strove to be keenly aware of ethical issues throughout the study. IRB protocol was followed and obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality was discussed multiple times with participants, as well as the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Data was securely stored and pseudonyms were used. To ensure validity, two methods of data collection allowed for the triangulation of data, participants were asked to review interviews for accuracy, and I spent time getting to know the participants and making them feel comfortable with me and the study. With the methodology described in this chapter, discussion in Chapter 4 turns to the results of this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study explored motivation from the perspectives of Office of the Registrar support staff and registrars at institutions in the Four State Area (Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas). Participants were asked about their opinions and experiences regarding leadership strategies, motivators, and indicators of high and low motivation. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory provided a theoretical framework for this study. The goal of this study is to answer the research question: What motivates support staff in the Office of the Registrar?

Participants discussed the factors affecting the motivation of Office of the Registrar support staff. Although participants varied in terms of age, race, and length of time working in the Office of the Registrar, they all were female. Each participant gave seemingly frank answers regarding their personal motivation levels, their perceptions of their coworkers' motivation levels, and various factors that they viewed as impacting employee motivation.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from interviews and document analysis and the three major emergent themes. Data was collected during December 2020 and January 2021 while the COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak. A total of six staff members from two institutions participated in this research. In addition to semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with the participants, documents provided by support staff members and registrars were analyzed. This chapter is organized into the following sections: research questions and interview responses, findings from the document analysis, emergent themes and a brief summary.

Research Questions and Interview Responses

Participants' comments are organized by research questions and corresponding interview questions. Additionally, participants' comments are organized by institution and by participant type, either support staff or registrar.

Research Question 1: How do participants describe their personal motivation level, the motivation levels of their coworkers, and the motivation levels of support staff?

Question 1: How would you describe your current motivation level?

ABC University support staff: The participant described her motivation level as “average.” She described how her motivation has been hampered by her lack of confidence by stating:

Personally, I don't think my level is above and beyond. I've been here a year and I'm finally like, I know how to do my job. I don't volunteer as much, but if it's asked of me I'll do it, but I'm still kind of like, “Ooh, I don't know if I know how to do that so...”

XYZ University support staff: Participants described their motivation levels as “pretty good” and “in the top part.” One participant discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic has increased her motivation by stating, “I like the part of working from home so that helps my motivation to work. I get more done. I enjoy it. There's less drama. I'm not one that has to be social.” Another participant described her motivation as “above average, but not great.” Additional comments from her are below.

We did just have a staff meeting. It's a lot of talk about budget cuts, budget cuts, budget cuts, and so it's a lot more pressure being put on departments to cut corners. So, that's discouraging, but my supervisor, she's pretty adamant that we're not going to have to cut any positions and she tries to ensure us that would be a last resort.

Question 2: For support staff only: How would you describe the motivation levels of fellow support staff in your office? For registrars only: How would you describe the current motivation levels of support staff?

ABC University support staff: The participant described high levels of motivation among other support staff members, stating that they go “above and beyond to help our students, especially during the pandemic,” “we’re all motivated to succeed,” and “we’re all motivated to make sure we all have a good work relationship.”

ABC University registrar: The registrar prefaced her response by discussing the importance of monitoring her employees’ motivation levels:

It’s always been my contention that in the registrar’s office, longevity is the best situation to have with my staff. It does not serve us well to have transitional, you know, people leaving all the time. So, I’m really concerned and try to find ways to make people want to stay here.

Although the ABC University registrar described support staff as being “in a good place” in terms of their motivation, she acknowledged that it had been challenging a few months earlier when the COVID-19 pandemic began. She attributed the struggle to maintain high motivation during this time to general fears and concerns about the virus, having to adapt to working remotely with little time to prepare, worries about how the pandemic would affect the institution’s finances, and being forced to communicate with each other in a new way. Furthermore, the ABC University registrar commented on how a newly hired employee was particularly affected because she did not have the opportunity to interact in person with coworkers and develop relationships: “Interestingly enough, we had someone start in March 2020 right as we went remote, so that person’s motivation, I think, suffered.”

XYZ University support staff: Participants differed in their opinions of coworkers’ motivation levels. One participant who viewed her coworkers as motivated stated, “I think everybody’s motivation is trying to get everything completed and get things done on time so that the student can do what they need to do. I think it’s actually pretty good right now.” Other participants disagreed by describing lower motivation levels: “I would say average, maybe kind

of neutral. There's just a lot of grumbling, like I said about the budget cuts, and I think everybody's just stressed with the pandemic." According to another participant:

I feel most of the time that they're motivated to do what's inside their little box and they're not thinking about how it could impact others or help others if they took the next step. They always want you to help but they're not always willing to reciprocate, and it's more of a "me" situation rather than a "team" situation.

XYZ University registrar: According to the XYZ University registrar, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have raised motivation levels:

I think they have really good motivation because they all have a lot of ownership in our office's reputation. I think some of their motivation levels have increased a little bit in our current work environment. Mainly because we've had to be creative and we've had to look at new ways to deliver services. We have really worked on making more things automated and electronic. I've asked them for their input on what would be the best way to do this and tried to encourage them to have some ownership in the processes and the changes. I think they feel motivated because they want those processes to work because they were involved in the change.

Question 3: What "clues" would indicate to you that a support staff member has a high level of motivation?

ABC University support staff: The participant discussed being on time for work, going above and beyond, following the dress code, and getting to know coworkers as indicators of high levels of motivation.

ABC University registrar: The participant mentioned that employees with high levels of motivation ask questions, offer help, try to go above and beyond, and are "happy, you can tell they're enjoying themselves."

XYZ University support staff: Participants mentioned that highly motivated employees have a positive attitude, are willing to go the extra mile, suggest better ways to do things, have a "go get 'em" attitude, and offer to help coworkers.

XYZ University registrar: Like the ABC University registrar, the XYZ registrar said that highly motivated employees would ask for additional responsibilities and volunteer for projects.

Question 4: What “clues” would indicate to you that a support staff member has a low level of motivation?

ABC University support staff: The participant felt that one indicator of low motivation would be complaining to coworkers about problems, such as heavy workloads, monotonous work, a micromanaging supervisor, lack of support and appreciation from high ranking university officials, and low pay.

ABC University registrar: The participant said that she would suspect that someone has a low level of motivation when they are not doing their job, not getting things done, or cannot answer questions after a certain amount of time in their position.

XYZ University support staff: Participants spoke about coworkers who did not try to find information themselves, were not on time for work or when returning from lunch breaks, and who complained about workloads.

XYZ University registrar: The responses overlapped with the ABC University registrar’s responses. She stated that “not getting things completed on time” was likely an indicator of low motivation.

Question 5: How would you describe your motivation level during office peak times?

ABC University support staff: The lone participant described high levels of motivation during office peak times:

Ooh, it does stress me out just a little bit, but because of my past work background, I feel like when there’s so much to do I feel like that’s when I’m the most motivated. I used to work at Walmart and I loved Black Friday. That was the best because it was just so busy. You were constantly just working so I enjoy that.

XYZ University support staff: Two of the three participants discussed being motivated by being able to see that their work benefitted others. One participant said, “I want to make sure everyone gets what they need – the students, the staff. When we’re in peak time, it’s to try and help those that need to be helped.” As another participant put it:

Everything’s just flowing so fast in and I’m trying to get it off my desk, pushed out. A lot of the stuff I do impacts students. It impacts faculty. It impacts staff. It impacts – maybe someone new trying to get in here.

The third participant discussed office peak times in terms of preparedness by stating:

I know when they’re coming and so I’m prepared for that. I try to make sure that I get adequate sleep the night before. Just trying to set myself up for that. So, it’s not like I’m motivated to do it but I’m prepared for it.

Question 6: For support staff only: How would you describe the motivation levels of fellow support staff during office peak times? For registrars only: How would you describe the motivation levels of support staff during office peak times?

ABC University support staff: The participant described coworkers as motivated during office peak times. She discussed how coworkers were successful in managing the stress by “spacing the work out” to keep from becoming overwhelmed and to stay motivated.

ABC University registrar: The registrar explained that the work never ends in the Office of the Registrar, and that might contribute to low motivation:

I think that it’s a challenge. It has been good, I will say that, but I will say that this is one of the, if not the, busiest office on campus. People do not realize that until they get here. You can tell them, and I always do, in the interview. I always make it very clear that this is a place where multitasking is a necessity, and you can get burned out easily because it is constant, it’s never enough, and it’s never too fast.

XYZ University support staff: One participant described how her coworkers do not work with a sense of urgency, which she viewed as an indication of low motivation: “Some of the others, they kind of just ‘go with the flow.’ They are more like, ‘Okay, if I get it done, oh

well. If I don't, it'll be there tomorrow.' That's just their personality. That's just how they are."

Another participant discussed how when things do not go as planned during peak times such as priority registration, new student orientation, and end of term processing, motivation can be affected. She spoke about how early in the COVID-19 pandemic, "a lot of faculty and staff and students had a lot of complaints because things weren't running as smoothly as they normally do and that was stressful." Motivation levels, she said, suffered because staff felt that they were doing everything in their power in a difficult situation to take care of the students but that they were not appreciated for their efforts. According to the third participant:

I think they're all motivated to help, some just take it to the extra level. Some get so caught up in how stressed they are that they tend not to help others because they're too busy. Some of them tend to get stressed out with multitasking.

XYZ University registrar: The XYZ University registrar explained that although peak times cause obvious stress for her staff, motivation levels are high during those periods:

They have a lot of stress – and they will exhibit that stress. You can see it in the way they carry their shoulders, and the way they clench their jaw, and the tone of their voice, the speed of their voice. I can always tell when they're really, really stressed. So, they have a lot of motivation and a lot of ownership of what they're doing but it's the stress that I still play with. Trying to figure out what's a good way to alleviate some of their stress.

Question 7: How would you describe your motivation level during office slow times?

ABC University support staff: The participant reported lower levels of motivation during office slow times. She said that on the rare occasion when she was caught up with work, she took the initiative and found something meaningful to do, even if the task was not part of her normal responsibilities. She also described using office slow times to connect with others and build relationships.

XYZ University support staff: All three participants echoed the ABC University staff member's responses. Participants stated, "I don't do well with downtime" and "I always have to

stay busy.” One participant who described her motivation level during slow times as “probably low,” stated that she used slower periods to think through processes for things that could be improved upon and ponder things that may be beneficial for her to implement in her job. Another participant said, “If I don’t have anything to do I will go find something to do or I will create something to do. There’s always something to do. And there’s always new stuff being created.” According to another participant, “There’s odds and ends jobs. There’s scanning that can always be done and things like that we would usually have our student workers do.”

Question 8: For support staff only: How would you describe the motivation levels of fellow support staff during office slow times? For registrars only: How would you describe the motivation levels of support staff during office slow times?

ABC University support staff: The participants reported that coworkers were “less motivated to be present” and “talk a little more” with each other during slow periods.

ABC University registrar: The ABC University registrar agreed with the support staff participant that slow periods in the office contribute to lower levels of motivation:

People want to be engaged, they want to be doing something, they want to feel valuable, they want to grow, they want to learn and progress. And so, I will say that at those times their motivation levels suffer.

XYZ University support staff: Participants differed in their responses, with two participants describing lower motivation levels. They said, “they’re not always as motivated as the other times” and “some of us are more willing to do some of those odds and ends jobs or seek out little things that need done more than others.” The third participant disagreed by describing her coworkers as “happy” during slow times because they “can interact with each other more.”

XYZ University registrar: The XYZ University registrar's responses were similar to those of the other participants. She noted that staff in her office had little downtime, but when they did, they used it to interact with each other:

I notice they might be a little more social with other people in the office. So, I feel like they're motivated but their motivation isn't necessarily a task driven motivation. It might be a motivation to improve morale, to form friendships and working relationships.

Research Question 2: How do participants view the job duties/work processes they (or support staff) perform in relation to motivation?

Question 1: What specific duties and tasks that you perform cause high motivation levels?

ABC University support staff: The support staff participant, who characterized herself as "outgoing," explained how she was motivated by organizing social activities for the staff:

They did an employee appreciation downstairs and it was cookies and hot chocolate. It really wasn't talked about in the office, but I'm an extravert so I made sure everyone in the office wanted to come down.

XYZ University support staff: One participant did not name specific tasks, but instead described in general how she was motivated by serving students, administrators, and faculty. She stated, "I really enjoy assisting them, and helping them, and problem solving. I mean, just the whole thing." Another participant described how one of her job duties in particular was motivating because it draws on her strengths and her personality:

I do really well with organization, timelines, deadlines, making sure things are in order. That's my personality type and so those types of things do motivate me. When we do our Clearinghouse enrollment reporting schedule, trying to line up all the dates. We have certain dates that we have to report. We try to keep that at least a year out. It's time-consuming but I like doing that so I am motivated to do it.

The third participant discussed how her work impacted other people, and how that kept her motivated:

If I don't do one thing I can't do the rest and nobody can do anything else. So, you have to be motivated to get the semester rolled and set up or you're not going to have classes to be out there and that's not going to come over very well. The initial start up comes with me for the semester, so I have to stay fairly on top of it to make sure it's all lined up so they can do their jobs.

Question 2: For support staff only: What specific duties and tasks that your fellow support staff perform cause high motivation levels? For registrars only: What specific duties and tasks that support staff perform cause high motivation levels?

ABC University support staff: The participant was unable to identify tasks that her coworkers performed that contributed to high motivation levels. She stated that she was relatively new to the office and that she was still not familiar enough with her coworkers' responsibilities to answer this question.

ABC University registrar: The ABC University registrar discussed her perspective that there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to motivating employees and assigning job duties:

I think that's going to depend on the type of person you hire. Everybody is motivated so differently and I try to keep an eye – I try to pay attention to that, to know what is the motivator for a person. I've got someone I hired, and I hired her specifically because she's so customer-service oriented. That was her background and she's one of those go out, and you know, just loves the world, and has fun, and communicates. What motivates her is to provide these group activities, these bonding experiences, these team-building experiences for staff. I'm like, 'Yeah, do it, you know. You're in charge of that.' So, trying to build a team where they have all of these various pieces and put them in the right place – that's hard stuff. Not everybody is motivated – I have some introverts, you know, and introverts like to do what they're supposed to do and get it done. So, I have a group that is diverse.

XYZ University support staff: Similar to the ABC University registrar's response, one participant discussed how personality contributes to motivation. She said, "Personality styles fit into their jobs. The two ladies in our records room – they're older and they've been there for a long time and they do the same thing every day, and I think that they like that." Another

participant described how being known as a “go-to” person on campus is motivating for her coworkers: “Anything that makes them feel important. I think a lot of them – they like the recognition of they’re the person that handles this task or that task.”

XYZ University registrar: The XYZ University registrar also spoke about personality differences and assigning job duties based on employees’ strengths:

What I’ve tried to do is to examine the work – the duties that appeal to their personality and match them up, and then I have to also look at some of their downfalls, too. So, I’ll just give the example of the drop refunds. I have a really dynamic entry level person that used to do the drop refunds, and she’s very – she loves to interact with the students, but her communication skills are not always the best. So, when you’re talking refunds, and people are looking at their money, and you might misuse a phrase or a term where you’re sending out an email and it’s not worded right, they were getting a little frustrated with it. So, that’s when I switched that duty up to somebody else who quite frankly, doesn’t really enjoy communicating with students that much but she has the communication skills to do it. We’ll look at trying to figure out a way to enhance this other staff member’s communication skills in order to alleviate some of the other person. So, I just think that it’s a trick to match up the duties and the tasks that they enjoy, that they like, and that they excel at with the right staff member.

Question 3: What specific duties and tasks that you perform cause low motivation levels?

ABC University support staff: The participant reported that she tended to delay taking care of tasks “that can be done in like, two seconds,” such as printing transcripts and preparing letters from a template, simply because she found them uninteresting.

XYZ University support staff: Participants viewed “monotonous type things like scanning” and “not getting a response from someone in a timely manner” as things that cause low motivation.

Question 4: For support staff only: What specific duties and tasks that your fellow support staff perform cause low motivation levels? For registrars only: What specific duties and tasks that support staff perform cause low motivation levels?

ABC University support staff: The participant felt that “mundane tasks in the office that we have to do” such as responding to routine email inquiries and repetitive data entry work caused low motivation levels.

ABC University registrar: The registrar immediately responded with her answer:

Well, that’s probably not that hard. Anything that’s high numbers and repetitive and in this office we have a lot of repetitive data work. We mark somebody as approved as a candidate for graduation. There may be 300, 400, 500, 600 people to mark. We have transcripts that we have to print out and fold, put in the mail. That’s pretty manual. That’s pretty low level, and I think of course those things tend to be less motivating. Everybody wants to be able to use their talents and their abilities to make decisions and to affect the way they work and in those things there’s not a lot, so, that would definitely be it.

XYZ University support staff: One participant reflected on how tasks and duties contributing to low motivation levels could vary from day to day and from person to person, so she felt that she was unable to provide a response to this question. Another participant described how some coworkers do not enjoy surprise projects or anything that deviates from their normal daily activities. She also said:

One lady does not like to answer the phones. She’s like, the second backup for out front. If both the main person and myself are busy or gone she digs her heels in on that – does not want to answer the phones. We all hate scanning. We try to put as much of that on our student workers as possible. There’s some of us – there’s a couple of us in the office that really like to help with commencement, myself included. Then there’s a couple of ladies that definitely don’t want to, and again, I don’t know if that’s just they want to be kind of like behind the scenes. They don’t want to be involved with the public necessarily.

XYZ University registrar: The registrar briefly discussed how dealing with “raunchy,” “disgruntled,” and “grouchy” faculty members was demotivating for staff. She agreed with the ABC University registrar about low level, menial tasks:

Mundane things. Things, that for some reason or another, some might think are below them. When we used to mail out a lot of stuff. The stuffing the envelopes and putting them together they – that was always a dreaded thing. But we don’t mail out so much anymore. The one big thing in our office that – for whatever reason – is the mail. Doing

our mail run. Going over and dropping off the mail, bringing the new mail back, sorting it, and putting it in the mailbox. For some reason, it's a huge deal and I have no idea why. I've assigned it, reassigned it, and it's like... It's not a big deal. I would love to get out of the office and go do it. Maybe just leave it and let me do it. It seems to be the biggest issue for those people who do it. And I think it's because several of the individuals that I had assigned to it and I have assigned to it now, I think they view it as a menial task that's below them. So, that's my challenge for the year is how to figure out how – I'm not lying! That's one of my goals I wrote at the first of the year was to figure out how to solve the mail problem.

Research Question 3: How do participants view elements of the work environment

(compensation, financial incentives, relationships, recognition, etc.) in relation to motivation?

Question 1: What elements of the work environment (compensation, financial incentives, relationships, recognition, etc.) contribute to high and low levels of motivation? Why? Does your work environment contain any of these elements? What elements are not present that you feel would help with motivation levels?

1.a: Professional development opportunities

ABC University support staff: The ABC University support staff participant spoke positively about professional development opportunities and agreed that they had an impact on motivation. She spoke of her desire to have periodic “refreshers” on tasks and processes that she does not perform on a regular basis. She also described her experience with a recent event organized by the organization for collegiate registrars and admissions officers in her state:

They just had the state conference and so we were able to go via Zoom. It was nice to actually be involved in that because I just think, “Oh, I’m just a records specialist – like, nothing special really.” So, it was nice to just be able to fellowship with everyone else. This was my first time hearing about it. From my assumption I thought it was just the registrar and the assistant registrar got to go. I didn’t think it was anybody else. So, it felt nice that, “Oh, us little people get to be involved in it.” That was kind of motivating. It just kind of makes you feel a little more empowered.

ABC University registrar: The ABC University registrar agreed with the support staff participant on the value of ongoing professional development, and has even made it a

requirement for employees: “In the last year I’ve required everyone to sign up for some professional development that HR has provided. I didn’t use to do that but I’ve decided that I need to do that because when you go, it is motivating.”

XYZ University support staff: Participants at XYZ University also viewed professional development as a motivator but expressed disappointment that opportunities were limited due to the institution’s financial situation:

We don’t have the money to go to conferences and things but that’s something that I had brought up even in like, 2019 before any of the pandemic stuff – to be able to do professional development and kind of got shut down on that. The professional development I do think would be a motivator – just to gain that extra knowledge and even just that investment from the university into us as employees shows something.

XYZ University registrar: Similar to the ABC University support staff participant, the XYZ registrar mentioned that employees found the networking aspect to be motivating:

It’s kind of been hard because with the budget cuts there’s no more opportunities for professional development – or are very slim. We used to be able to go to our state professional organization meeting once a year, our annual meeting. We don’t get to do that anymore. They looked forward to it. It was being able to build a relationship with other people, with their peers at other institutions, and that opportunity has kind of been taken away. When we were going it was a huge benefit and they embraced it and loved it, so that’s been kind of hard.

1.b: Staffing level of the office

When asked to identify elements of the work environment that contribute to high and low motivation levels, neither of the ABC University participants mentioned the office’s staffing level but all four XYZ University participants felt that it was an issue.

XYZ University support staff: All participants expressed views that the office was inadequately staffed and that it impacted their motivation levels. According to one participant:

So, this past year when we had to do – I think it was a 4% budget cut and this next year it’s supposed to be 10% – we cut – we lost a person. She quit and in the process of trying to hire for that position – last spring when everything kind of – we went remote and everything – they ended up just kind of distributing that work to the rest of us and

dissolving that position to save money. I think that we could use two extra people. I think we could use another person out front. I think that person – we rely on our student employee out there a lot, more than we probably should. So, to have an extra employee out front would be good, and then just an extra employee to kind of take on some of those responsibilities that were put on us when that first person left.

A second support staff member stated:

I feel that we are understaffed. I feel like I have to work harder because of it. I think that's why my workload is heavy like it is, is because of that. She'll be starting classes here soon so I'll – she'll bump back down to 20 hours so I'll only have her 20 here this – my student – here 20 hours a week. So, of course my stress level goes up a little bit but I just kind of try to be calm about it and do what I can with the time that I have because that's all I can do.

The third participant agreed that the office was not adequately staffed and elaborated on how it has impacted her:

Probably why I've had to answer the phone and sit up front probably frustrates me more than anything else. So someone else can get their job done. That it's their job to answer the phone and cover the front as well. When they can't do their job and have to have time off to do their job I'm supposed to do my job plus their job. How am I expected to do it without an issue if they can't do it? Just a frustration on the fairness or why. I don't mind answering the questions. I enjoy being able to give someone answers so they don't have to keep looking for that. That's not the issue. It's generally the reason why I'm having to answer the phone and cover the front. Helping out if they're swamped, if someone's gone. I get that. Just because they can't get their job done doesn't really sit too well with me.

XYZ University registrar: The XYZ registrar echoed the comments of her staff:

We lost a position last year due to some budget cuts and we've lost student worker positions that have helped with some of the being able to manage lunch breaks and different things like that. So, no, we're not adequately staffed at all. I have a couple of staff members – that hasn't really impacted them at all. But I have a couple other staff members that it has added workload to their work and it's been very stressful for them to try to keep it up. That's all been fairly new – fairly recent changes. Some of them have had some family issues that have come up that have had an impact on their workload. They've just been a little overwhelmed with all of it.

1.c: Relationships

ABC University support staff: The ABC University support staff participant viewed relationships as contributing to high levels of motivation. She stated:

I think the office atmosphere does help towards motivation. It helps you want to be there. I think we all get along. We all have our chats and discussions. We have a good time but it is an office of women, so, there can be little tiffs here and there but we're all adults so we all work it out. I'm friends with everybody in the office. I'm really close with – me and another coworker are around the same age and so, we're really close. Everyone else is a little older than us, but we still talk to them and in some ways like, they're kind of our work moms. I enjoy the relationships that I have with everyone. It helps me enjoy the workday.

ABC University registrar: The ABC University registrar discussed at length the value of relationships in the office and how they can motivate employees:

I have five people out in the main office and then I have the two, the associate and the assistant, who are in another office. You know, separate offices. So, I will say that the people in the outer office do. They talk about each other's kids, what's going on in their life. They know everything about each other that's going on. That doesn't extend to us, to the top tier. It does to one of them because she's more driven – that's more of her motivator, too, is relationships. I definitely see it out there and it's a motivator.

The camaraderie. The family. I know people make fun of this too, though, so especially on years when we haven't gotten a raise I'll be like, "Oh yeah. Family. Well, you know. Yeah, yeah, right. We didn't get a raise." But I think there is a lot of that ability you know, that cohesiveness of a small university where people care about each other. Those are things that motivate first time – everyone to some degree – but definitely the first time people who start here and they see how people work together and they see how you know, concerned – how many of us go the extra mile for students and for each other.

XYZ University support staff: Only one of the three XYZ University participants described relationships among coworkers as negative and contributing to low motivation levels:

They want to come and talk, and they want to tell you what this one said and they want to tell you what that one said. If they would talk to each other about their issues rather... They're nice ladies on one side, but some of them are not averse to throwing others under the bus. The drama that goes on in our office, and I'm sure it's in any office with women...

Another participant explained how she found relationships with the individuals that she worked with and served to be motivating:

I love working with everybody: the community, the administration, the people that I work with, the faculty and staff throughout campus, the interaction with everyone that I have, which is pretty much everybody. I'm not on the front line but I can still see out front and still see and help and do that stuff. When and if they ever hire somebody

new to be out on the front I'll miss that part of it, I know that. But still, having the interaction with everybody – I enjoy it. I mean, I really do. Everybody gets along. Everybody's friendly. We know everybody's spouses. We know everybody's kids. We can joke around with each other and we do okay. We know not to cross the lines.

XYZ University registrar: The registrar discussed how she attempts to build relationships with her staff, and how that can be challenging for someone who has recently transitioned from a coworker to a supervisor:

You have to distance yourself a little bit but yet you still have to maintain that role that you're not just interested in them and the work that they do. That you're interested in them as a person and to understand what drives them, what motivates them.

1.d: Internal organizational structure

ABC University support staff: The participant described the organizational structure of the office as a motivator:

We just started this kind of like, tiered thing. So, it's Amanda and then these two individuals and then the four of us in the office are under. So, I have a "supervisor" and then I have Amanda, and I think that's kind of helped because, not that Amanda's not easy to talk to. But it's nice to, you know, have a middle person to kind of bounce ideas off of or just answer simple questions instead of go directly to Amanda, who, we know she's busy and kind of swamped with bigger things. So, it's nice to just have that middle person there. I like that a lot.

ABC University registrar: The participant also mentioned the recent restructuring. She highlighted its benefits, which include preparing staff for leadership and freeing up some of her time to handle more complicated tasks.

XYZ University support staff: Support staff at XYZ University did not share the same positive views as their ABC University counterpart regarding the organizational structure of the office. According to one participant:

I feel like our associate registrar is not as good at communication. And sometimes that frustrates people because like, if Jennifer is busy and she says, you know, "Go ask Stacey." Is her name. Then Stacey doesn't know and so she says, "Well, let's just wait and talk to Jennifer." That's frustrating. She's only been in that position I think for a couple years and I think she likes to act like – she wants people to think that she knows a

lot of stuff but really she doesn't. And so that breakdown of communication, you know, in my mind it should be, you know, the big problems are for the registrar and then some of the stuff that she's too busy for you can go to the associate. And it doesn't work. It always gets looped back up because she doesn't know.

Another participant expressed a similar view:

My supervisor is the associate registrar but I basically talk to both of them. If I need something done I go to the registrar. The associate one – she can be a very nice person. Working with her – (shakes head) I'm not going to get an answer on anything. I really don't know everything she does, but she doesn't know enough about mine or takes the time to know about mine to be able to answer questions. Instead of going to her and waiting for an answer to come back from Jennifer I generally just email them both or just go straight to the registrar. Jennifer's tried to get it more in a "you can go to this person to ask for help" but she's always the one to help if you need it.

XYZ University registrar: The registrar agreed that the current structure was the source of some issues among the staff. She spoke candidly and at length:

I think some people put a little more onus on who supervises who. You know what I mean? I don't know if I'm going to communicate this very well. I have a staff member who she's the associate registrar. And before I came into this position the previous registrar had done some restructuring. And really all the restructuring was – in order to give her a raise, she had to justify with our HR office – and she moved the supervision of one staff member under her. And at times that causes some issues. And I think at times people take that in a different manner. So, I don't see being somebody's supervisor as just being able to monitor what they do every day. But you have a responsibility to work with them in a different manner than if you were just their coworker. And this particular person is kind of taken it as a little bit of a power trip rather than trying to embrace how to motivate this person to do things a little bit different or to encourage them to keep doing the good things they are doing and views it as more of like a monitor. Like, "I'm just monitoring what she's doing and what she's not doing ." And so, I think as far as just in general the entry level positions – I think as an institution is – any institution – I think that should be one of the key factors they look at is your hierarchy and just because somebody's going to be someone's supervisor they shouldn't be placed in that role just to justify a pay increase.

What happens a lot of times is they won't necessarily go to her or include her. Let's say one of them is having some issues with a department and they're emailing the department. Nine times out of ten they're going to include me in the email but they're not going to include her. I think they see that change – they don't see her as actually their supervisor. So, they just bypass her and it causes some issues. So, we've had several meetings about it. The three of us. "You need to include her. You can't just come to me. I do understand that some of these issues that you're having are things that I do need

to know about.” So, it’s just kind of restructuring things. If she really doesn’t have a say in what’s going on, this other person is like, “I don’t need to involve her. Why can’t I just...” So, it’s been kind of tricky because it’s a discussion that I’ve had with my vice president about. I don’t know that what I inherited is really the right way to do it. And so now it’s like, “Are we going to undo it? And if we do undo it, how do we do that?” So, that’s kind of where we’re at right now. You know, the entry level person doesn’t really respect her as a supervisor. They send their leave slips to her and she signs off on them and that’s about all she really does with her. That’s kind of a trick. It’s a challenge.

1.e: Office mission

ABC University support staff: When asked if the office mission influences motivation levels, the participant was unaware of the office mission. She did not comment on an institutional mission. She indicated that even though she was not familiar with an official office mission, she articulated a common purpose that existed among staff in the office:

I don’t know if we have a mission. I know we have office meetings and so, the main things in those office meetings is how to improve our service to students, and how we can help more students. But as far as like a mission, no, I think the atmosphere, like, the shared – we all have a shared goal of just to make things accessible and easier and to help the students so I think that helps as far as motivating.

ABC University registrar: The registrar voiced a different perspective. Although her response focused on the institutional mission instead of the office mission, she mentioned that it had been discussed with staff and how it should guide their work:

Well, we were having a series of meetings before the pandemic. Everything’s kind of changed since then but before that – we have a very easy mission statement: (institutional mission statement). And it’s easy to remember and it’s easy to talk about. It’s easy to figure out what that means. Sort of. But I mean, there’s a downside to it, too. (Institutional mission statement)? That’s a lot. But so, yes, we’ve had those discussions before the pandemic. We were trying to meet as a group and come to a common agreement on what was exceptional customer service. We were trying to identify that. We’ve gotten away from that because of the pandemic but I want to get back to that because I think that’s important – we have a common set of standards you know, for phone calls, for emails.

XYZ University support staff: One participant stated that the office mission was reviewed periodically but that it did not seem to contribute to motivation levels:

Honestly, only when it's time for them to talk about it. Yeah, generally there's more things going on. It's not something that – it does impact us but it doesn't directly impact us when we're doing our jobs. So, it's more doing what you have to do and get done what needs to be done rather than thinking about the impact or "the statement" that the college is trying to do.

Like the ABC University support staff participant, the two other XYZ University participants were not familiar with the mission. One XYZ University participant described a similar shared purpose among the staff:

I don't know what our office mission is. Or even if we have one. So, that's not something we talk about, definitely. But yeah, I think we have a sense of shared purpose. You know, we all kind of pull together like, at the end of the term and once everything is wrapped up and the grades are rolled and degrees are awarded or whatever, it's kind of you know, it's not like we throw a big party or anything. Especially not now. But you know, we all can kind of sigh relief together and... I would like to say that we all pull together during some of those stressful times – a little bit. I think we could do it more. But yeah, I mean, as far as seeing the process move forward you know, once we do our stuff and then the other departments can do their stuff and then the students graduate and we get to help with that at commencement and stuff – I can see that.

XYZ University registrar: The XYZ University registrar acknowledged that support staff may have difficulty identifying the office mission and connecting it to the tasks they perform on a daily basis.

You know, we wrote our office mission quite a while ago and everybody had a say in our office mission, but if you asked all of them today what our office mission was they probably couldn't tell you. They honestly probably couldn't tell you what it was. But out of all of my staff members I would say at – everyone except for maybe two were involved in us actually writing and creating our office mission. So, I can't say that it really has a big impact. I think the components within our office mission – without them knowing what our office mission is – I think they exhibit it and they embrace it and they see that as a key function of what they do. But I don't think they make that correlation.

1.f: Financial compensation and incentives

ABC University support staff: Responses were limited regarding financial compensation and incentives, but the participant agreed that pay raises and bonuses are nice to receive. She also expressed disappointment that they are rarely given.

ABC University registrar: The registrar called low salaries for support staff at the university “a huge de-motivator.” She also described how pay raises accompanied recent changes to the office structure:

We had some raises that came along with that because I tried to convince leadership that these people are in a compliance area where it is extremely important that we have longevity. We have to reward them. They’re doing things – they’re doing so much and – much more than other places on campus and they need to be rewarded for that to cause them – to motivate them to stay. So, a raise came with it and I think that was motivating for a while. We’ll see how long...

She also echoed the support staff participant’s comments regarding how raises and bonuses could actually be demotivating for staff:

Financial remuneration is difficult. And you know, there have been many years we haven’t gotten a raise or we’ve gotten a 2% raise. It’s not common across campus for all offices. There are offices that have gotten raises and they know who they are and they pay attention to the blue book, you know, and that is very difficult. Because you think, “Well, gee, I thought we didn’t have any money.” You know, “I thought we couldn’t have any raises.” But you see raises and you see big raises in some cases. So, that is difficult.

XYZ University support staff: Although one participant briefly stated that an increase in financial compensation would be “helpful” but not impact her motivation much, the other two participants placed more emphasis on it. One participant said:

They used to do bonuses. They don’t anymore with everybody new coming in. I’m grateful that I still get mine. But after – and they’re only once a year. We get evaluated every so often. Are there raises there? Sometimes, but not really. I feel like I’m underpaid for everything that I do. Because I feel like I go – I just don’t stay within my little box. I go outside of it if I need to. But, you know, I know that the funds are tight right now so I understand that. But, I feel like there should be maybe more compensation for that but there’s not.

According to another participant:

The position that was cut – a lot of the duties were put on myself and one other person with a title change and a salary increase for both of us. So, that was motivation, you know. But I don’t think that it’s adequate. But as they’re talking about adding more duties and stuff I’m starting to feel overwhelmed. There’s also a breaking point of that too because I’m thinking you know, if I got a big increase in salary would I be able

to handle this workload that they're talking about putting on me? And I don't think an increase in salary would – there's just – there's only so much that one person can do.

XYZ University registrar: XYZ University's registrar agreed with the other participants that raises were not often given often:

Compensation is always a huge hot topic and you know, in the state of (state name) we just haven't had very many raises and – or any raises. And when I lost that one position we did some restructuring in our office and a couple of our staff members got promoted to different positions. And so, they got a little bit of a pay increase for those promotions and those adjustments. And some of the folks that did not receive that you know, they weren't really put out by it. They were more excited for them that this was an opportunity for them that they wouldn't have otherwise gotten.

1.g: Cross-training

ABC University support staff: The participant described cross-training as a motivator and said that she wanted more of it in the office: "Everyone knows how to do my job because it has to be done when I'm gone. But I don't know how to do anybody else's job. So, I kind of, you know, feel inadequate there."

ABC University registrar: The participant did not cross-training as a motivator.

XYZ University support staff: One participant described cross-training as motivating, but because there was no formal plan or schedule for it, it was hard for staff to devote time to it. Another participant had mixed feelings on cross-training. Although she had been trained to perform a few of her coworkers' duties and felt motivated by that, no one had been cross-trained on her duties. She reported that she filled in for others when they were out of the office, but that was not reciprocated when she was sick or on vacation. She was de-motivated by cross-training not being equally applied to all positions in the office.

XYZ University registrar: The registrar discussed cross-training from the perspective of staff in her office working with other departments on projects and programs:

They've been able to build some relationships that have kind of been strained due to you know, preconceived ownership of processes. When you have a preconceived notion of what somebody's motivation is and – being able to step back from that and maybe view a process outside of your office from a different lens – can really change that relationship and in turn change your motivation towards working with that department.

1.h: Fringe benefits

ABC University support staff: The participant did not discuss fringe benefits.

ABC University registrar: The registrar mentioned that ABC University offers a variety of fringe benefits that can be motivators, such as the state retirement system, vacation and sick leave, and the ability to earn an academic credential at little or no cost. She also said that recent changes to the health insurance plan resulting in higher costs may have contributed to lower motivation.

XYZ University support staff: Only one participant from XYZ University spoke about fringe benefits affecting employee motivation. She stated that several coworkers took advantage of the tuition discount for either themselves or family members.

XYZ University registrar: The registrar did not discuss fringe benefits.

1.i: Teamwork

ABC University support staff: The participant said that she was motivated by teamwork and said that “we all help each other.”

ABC University registrar: The registrar described promoting a team environment: “I encourage everyone to jump in and when you have time to learn other things that people are doing and to help if you have time – and a lot of times I offer that help if I can.”

XYZ University support staff: One participant stated that “everyone chips in to help out.” Another participant described her coworkers as motivated to work together to keep the work moving along:

Everybody works really well together here as a team. I think would be a high motivation in getting things done in a timely manner, assisting each – with each other with matters that are – if they need help. I can say that a lot of them are constantly reaching out because their student workers need help or need something to do and so, we're constantly trying to, "Okay, well, here. They can take this on. And they can take this on." So, then of course that helps them to help their area you know, to keep the student working.

XYZ University registrar: The registrar did not discuss teamwork.

1.j: Other elements mentioned by participants

1.j.1: Career advancement opportunities

ABC University support staff: The participant identified the lack of career advancement opportunities as a de-motivator:

In our office it's hard to move up. It's hard to feel valued, like, you know your job is important but there's no way to move up. There's no way to get more money. You can't move up unless a position opens, and then you know, you're usually in that position for years. You're kind of, I don't want to say stuck, but you are. You're kind of stuck in your position.

1.j.2: Leadership changes

XYZ University support staff: One participant said that recent leadership changes have raised motivation levels:

The atmosphere is – I have to say is a lot better than what it was 10 years ago. Talking about now and the pathway the past year things have gotten brighter because of the new leadership. People were working more. People were staying you know, in their areas and working and not out socializing as much. The whole morale around here was better. The old registrar was never here because she was also the director of financial aid and so she was doing two jobs. So, she was always down in financial aid and was never here. I was a little intimidated with the last person. I just felt like – I really didn't have a – I guess you can say we have a relationship with Jennifer. And I didn't have that with the person before. She was just the boss lady to me.

XYZ University registrar: The participant described how she viewed the support staff as "a little more driven" due to changes in the office leadership. Office of the Registrar staff "didn't feel that connection" with the previous registrar, "felt slighted," and that

they were not “much of a priority.” She stated that after that position was split in two and she was promoted to registrar, staff feel “like they have a little more say.”

Research Question 4: How do participants view leadership styles and behaviors in relation to motivation?

Question 1: For support staff only: What strategies does your supervisor use to encourage high levels of motivation for support staff? Are there any strategies that your supervisor is not utilizing that you would like them to utilize? For registrars only: What strategies do you use to encourage high levels of motivation for support staff? Are there any strategies that you are not utilizing that you would like to utilize?

1.a: Praise, recognition, expressing appreciation

ABC University support staff:

The participant said that the registrar gave praise and recognition but that it was not frequent or abundant. She said, “I won’t say she doesn’t give kudos a lot.”

ABC University registrar: The ABC University registrar held a different view, stating that recognition was given “in the office, in front of each other, and regularly.” She elaborated:

Trying to consciously be mindful of telling people, “Thank you for your contribution. I appreciate it.” Recognizing them among my team. Yes. Now recognizing people on – on the university – sometimes we have awards and things and I always find that difficult because if I’m trying to nominate one person for an award, I have found that is demotivating to the rest of the staff. So, I never do that. But we have been nominated for a team award a time or two and I will do that.

XYZ University support staff: Responses regarding praise and recognition were mixed. One participant, whose direct supervisor is the associate registrar, stated after a long pause, “Praise from my supervisor’s not going to happen.” However, she described the registrar as more generous with praise and recognition:

She is very quick to acknowledge who did what. At Christmas she went around to everybody and dropped off a gift. She dropped it off, rang the doorbell, and waved from her car. So, she's really good about trying to make sure everyone's happy. Give them a little extra. Thank them for something that they did that you wouldn't even think about. So, she's really good about it.

Another participant disagreed, stating that the registrar did not give praise or public recognition often:

I would like to see more of that because I feel like when we do what we're supposed to be doing and everything goes right, that's just expected. But when something goes wrong it's a big deal. I would like to be recognized for when things go as expected.

The same participant also described the lack of appreciation from senior university officials contributes to lower motivation levels:

I feel like from the higher ups, we just hear a lot of the negative stuff and it's not balanced with, "But you guys are doing a great job." And they do, that's not to say that there's nothing. The president sent out a "Happy Holidays" email and said, "Thanks for all your hard work." Things like that. And I know there's only so much that they can do. That's hard, but that does cause low motivation though when you feel like you're busting your butt and they're still like, "Well, it's still not quite good enough."

XYZ University registrar: The XYZ University registrar gave examples of how she recognizes and shows appreciation for staff:

I try to buy them lunch every once in a while. At Christmastime, I bought them lunch. We'll periodically do a Dairy Queen run every once in a while just to give them a little bit of a bump there. It's not just about sitting at your desk and doing this all day long – that I can see that you have something to contribute to the greater good.

1.b: Communication

ABC University support staff: The participants said that the registrar did a good job of communicating with the staff. She described communication as "a nice way to motivate us so we're not just sideswiped."

ABC University registrar: The ABC University registrar agreed that communication can impact motivation. While the office worked from home due to COVID-19, she worked to

maintain communication among staff members by organizing regular virtual meetings and keeping staff informed through the shared responsibility of monitoring the office's generic email account. She described how communication was challenging at first:

The start was difficult because the communication and the day to day level communication wasn't as robust as it is when we're all together. But they were talking with each other, they were texting, so they found solutions to some communication. So, I think overall they held it together and their morale ended up being good.

XYZ University support staff: All participants agreed that the registrar did a good job of communicating. According to one participant:

Well, we're all doing Zoom or instant messages now. I know for me – we talk a lot through the messaging or she'll call me and talk to me about something. I think that the personal connection of calling or doing it is what makes the other people – I know I appreciate it if she's asking me to do something rather than just shooting an email – calling me and – that way I can ask questions and it's a whole lot easier to ask questions than it is to type questions. You can get a feel of the situation that way.

Another participant stated:

I feel like sometimes communication is too frequent. Definitely – I would say once a month for staff meetings would be good. I think every two weeks is too frequent. Because I feel like we talk about the same thing and it gets into a complaining-fest of basically budget. That's the big talk. All the time.

XYZ University registrar: The participant described her efforts to motivate staff through communication:

Communication is a big thing and I try really hard to have regular staff meetings. I try to update them on meetings that I have at the higher level: my division meetings, the president's council that I sit in on, all of those meetings. I come back and fill them in on everything so that they're aware of some of the stuff that's going on around campus so they're not – they don't feel like they're shut out or unaware of things, and then I ask people to go around the room and share what's going on with them.

1.c: Empowering staff

ABC University support staff: The participant mentioned that she was motivated by the registrar soliciting staff's input before making decisions that impact their work.

ABC University registrar: The registrar spoke briefly about empowering employees by stating, “I’m not a micromanager, but in some cases to a fault, because sometimes I probably need to be more of a micromanager, honestly, but I want people to feel that control of their own work.”

XYZ University support staff: One participant had a neutral opinion on the amount of freedom she has to do her job: “Nobody really checks to see what I do, when I do it, or how I do it. That could be a good thing. That could be a bad thing. I guess they trust me enough to get it done.” Another participant said that she recently suggested ideas for improving a process to the registrar and that they were approved and implemented. She said, “It made me feel really good. It helped the other girls out tremendously. She’s always open to changes.”

XYZ University registrar: The participant agreed with the ABC registrar about the challenge of trying to balance solving problems for employees with autonomy:

I’m an ‘action’ kind of person. I want to just jump in. And I’m a fixer. I know enough about my own personal background to know that has a huge thing to do with my leadership style. And so I’ve really had to observe myself in those situations and not be the fixer. To give them the tools to fix it themselves and then the next time they’ll know how to do it on their own.

1.d: Providing support

ABC University support staff: The participant described how she is motivated by knowing that the registrar is aware of her projects and workload and is ready to offer support if she needs it:

I would say when I do drop, adds, and withdrawals. I think just because my boss specifically gave me that job when I first started. We didn’t always do that and she kind of monitors how many come in because when they do come in then I know she’s paying attention. Knowing that she’s watching and she could be seeing – knowing that I can show her how good I’m doing that helps me get those done and work harder on those.

ABC University registrar: The ABC University registrar shared a recent situation in which she provided support to an employee:

I encourage them to come to me. Don't wait for me to come to you. If something's not going the way you feel like it is then you need to come to me and let me know. And they do that too. I had one who started last year, and we have a new online program that we're enrolling for and I've done some planning to try to make sure that we can handle that additional workload. But one of my new people came in and she's like, "I'm just going to get real right now." And it was so cute. She was overwhelmed. And she let me know it. And I was appreciative. Immediately I offered help. I said, "What can I do? Let me take some of this off your plate. What can we reorganize? Tell me where the push points are. Tell me where the narrow times are where you can't get it all done." But the very first thing is, "How can I help?" Because when somebody comes to you and that's where they're at they need immediate relief.

XYZ University support staff: One participant described the XYZ registrar as "really pretty good with backing people." She further elaborated, "Whatever the situation – if you were correct, she will back you. And even if you were wrong she's pretty much going to make it sound that – not blaming you. She'll avoid putting you in a bad position." Another participant described how the registrar supports her both professionally and personally:

They're talking about adding some other cohorts and adding more duties and stuff and I'm starting to feel overwhelmed. I actually just had a conversation with Jennifer about that the other day. She understood and was going to look at redistributing some of those duties to some of the other ladies in the office. She did empathize with me, I guess. And she understood that it was a lot. So, that was nice to hear. I have a very open relationship with her. Very open relationship with her. Listening to us when we have a bad day. Being home with a sick child this week – I've had some bad days. And just letting me rant to her. I know a lot of people do that about their own situation. I feel that's a good kind of vent for frustrations.

The third participant agreed that the registrar provides support that impacts her motivation level: "She makes it easy and comfortable for me to talk to her. Because of the compassion that she has and the understandings I guess. I feel like I can go to her with just about anything."

XYZ University registrar: The XYZ University registrar described a similar situation as the ABC University registrar:

We have had to do some restructuring when we lost that position. And it's been about a year now so I've asked them to, "Let's regroup. Let's reevaluate. Is it working? Is it not working? I'm not saying this is a permanent duty of yours. But let's talk about how we can shift some things around." I think some of them were extremely overwhelmed but once I said that to them they have come to me and said, "I really appreciate the fact that you said that."

1.e: Teambuilding activities and social events

ABC University support staff: The participant discussed that birthdays were celebrated in the office: "We make a big deal about birthdays which I think is super special." She also described feeling motivated by a recent teambuilding activity organized by the registrar and commented on how it improved relationships in the office:

It was about introverts and extraverts and it put us – we had to put ourselves in those categories and how we communicate with each other in the office. I think it helped other people learn us, because they see us every day but they don't really know us too well. It was just nice to know, "Okay, she's kind of quiet and she prefers this." So, I could communicate with her a lot better.

ABC University registrar: When asked about a strategy to encourage high motivation that she is not currently using but would like to use, the registrar identified a teambuilding retreat:

I would really like for us to have a teambuilding exercise where we perhaps even go away from the office and do something. We've never done it. It's so difficult because we feel like we can never be gone. We can never be closed. And so I find that hard. So, since I hired the person who really likes that kind of teambuilding stuff, we've done more now than we ever did. We had a Christmas party Friday. Just for a little bit. And we played a couple of games that were really fun. I was just like, "Oh, God, I don't have time for games." But we played them. And it was fun. Stuff like that is good.

XYZ University support staff: All participants said that staff did not socialize outside of the office but that it was common to celebrate birthdays and major holidays together in the office with food. One participant still working from home described how she looks forward to

getting back to interacting with her coworkers again in person once the COVID-19 pandemic ends:

That camaraderie – I feel like made everybody in a better spirit. I think that right now we all just feel kind of out on a life raft by ourselves a little bit. I get my energy from being around people and so it's been really hard to be separated and not have those office parties and those office get-togethers and things. But I know for other people they have loved that. They don't feel like they have to be a part of that. But for me I would welcome whenever that can happen again. That would be a good motivator for me.

XYZ University registrar: The registrar discussed social events such as birthday celebrations, gift exchanges at Christmas, and an online recipe exchange during the COVID-19 pandemic as ways to motivate employees.

1.f: Feedback

ABC University support staff: The participant described how her expectations for feedback differed from the registrar's approach:

If she doesn't say anything then you know you're doing okay. Which was hard for me at first because I'm like, "I need feedback." Individually, I need that feedback and that was hard at first just to kind of learn how she gives feedback. I know if she doesn't comment about that then I know I'm doing alright.

ABC University registrar: The registrar did not comment on giving feedback.

XYZ University support staff: One participant mentioned how the registrar has not been hesitant to offer constructive criticism:

Jennifer actually has motivated me more in pushing me more to be better. I thank her for that. There are some things that she had pointed out to me at one time and I was like, "Yeah, I know I can probably do better on that." She's like, "I know you have this in you and I know that you can do it." She's very good at helping me get there.

XYZ University registrar: The XYZ University registrar described a recent situation in which she had to give feedback to an employee who was having trouble with a newly assigned duty. She said, "I try really hard not to do the scolding or anything like that but – to just give them a little prompt."

Document Analysis

In addition to the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, document analysis was also performed to collect data. As previously mentioned, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented me from examining documents and artifacts in person. Participants attached documents to an email or took a photograph of artifacts and sent it to me by email. Interviews were conducted first, and at the conclusion of each interview, I explained what types of documents or artifacts I was looking for and asked participants to send them to me for review. Each participant was invited to provide at least one document that would provide additional or supporting information about the registrars' leadership traits and strategies related to their efforts in motivating support staff. Participants were asked to consider a variety of document types, such as emails, handwritten thank you cards, or meeting minutes. In addition to documents, I encouraged participants to consider artifacts, such as signs, trophies, or plaques that could be evidence of how the registrars motivate staff. Since the COVID-19 pandemic prevented me from examining the documents and artifacts in person, study participants either attached the document to an email or took a photograph of the artifact and sent it to me by email.

A total of six items were submitted for document analysis. The ABC University registrar sent two items, a document and a picture of an artifact that she felt were both representative of her efforts to motivate staff. The support staff participant from ABC University also submitted two items. Two participants from XYZ University, the registrar and one support staff member, did not respond to my request for a document or artifact.

As mentioned previously, interviews were the main method of data collection for this study and I began searching for emergent themes from the very first interview. Multiple rounds

of coding were performed, and as I reached the final stages of coding, I began incorporating the documents and artifacts into the analysis.

ABC University Documents

Interestingly, the two participants sent a picture of the same item, a Keurig coffee maker purchased by the registrar for the entire office to use. Amanda, the registrar at ABC University, explained that she purchased the coffee maker as a motivator for the team after they returned to the office following three months of remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The support staff participant, Danielle, described the coffee maker as “super nice” and much appreciated by staff in the office.

Danielle provided a picture of a second item, a \$25 Visa gift card that she received from the registrar as a Christmas gift. She said that every staff member in the office also received a similar gift card from the registrar. Danielle also said that the gift cards were unexpected and that it was “very thoughtful” of the registrar to spend her personal funds on gifts for the staff.

The second item submitted by Amanda for document analysis was a leadership newsletter that she subscribes to. Every month, she said, she receives the newsletter by email and forwards it to her staff. The newsletter contains articles on leadership, customer service, communication, and other relevant topics. Amanda mentioned that she encourages staff to read the newsletter when they have time. She views the newsletter as a form of professional development and hopes that the staff finds the newsletter to be motivating.

XYZ University Documents

One support staff participant, Erica, emailed a picture of a greeting card that she received from her coworkers after the birth of a child a few months earlier. In her description of the greeting card, Erica wrote that the XYZ University registrar initiated the card and sent it around the office for everyone to sign. Erica also said:

Jennifer also had everyone chip in to get us some restaurant gift cards so we didn't have to cook with a new baby at home! I know that is not specific to an office setting, but it shows how she is involved in our personal lives which means a lot to me.

Another staff participant, Margo, emailed a section from her most recent performance evaluation. Margo highlighted one part of the evaluation in particular that she regarded as indicative of the registrar's attempts to motivate staff. The highlighted section consisted of areas of Margo's performance in which there were opportunities for improvement. The registrar had written a few brief narrative comments explaining these areas and outlined practical steps that Margo could take to improve in these areas. As she discussed during her interview, Margo wrote in her email that conversations regarding improvement areas can feel discouraging and even hurtful. However, Margo said that she was motivated by this feedback from the registrar because of the kind, inspiring, and non-judgmental style in which it was given.

Emergent Themes

Three major themes began to emerge immediately from participant interviews: connections with others, shared goals and purpose, and employee personality. Although not every participant contributed to every theme, multiple rounds of coding allowed the shared thoughts and ideas of a large number of the participants to become apparent. Each theme is briefly discussed in this section.

The first theme, connections with others, emerged from the very first interview. Almost every participant touched upon some aspect of this theme at least once during their interviews. Connections with others is a complex theme which encompasses various types of relationships such as support staff's relationships with other support staff members, support staff's relationships with the registrar, support staff's relationships with students, and support staff's relationships with faculty and staff from other departments on campus. Most participants, even

those with more introverted personalities, expressed feeling motivated by friendships with coworkers, social events within the office and on campus, and teambuilding exercises.

The second theme, shared goals and purpose, was apparent even though most support staff participants were unaware of the office mission. Participants spoke of the office staff working together as a team to serve and support students and the broader campus community. They spoke of feeling motivated by seeing that every staff person's individual efforts contribute to a much larger, common purpose. Even though they could not answer confidently whether an office mission existed, support staff participants were able to articulate goals that they felt were shared among the staff in the office.

Finally, employee personality began to take shape as a theme from the first few interviews that were conducted. Multiple participants described how personality factored in as a motivator, causing office staff to seek out or avoid certain job duties, activities, or events. Participants gave several examples of themselves or their coworkers feeling motivated by tasks that drew upon their strengths, and conversely, feeling demotivated by tasks and activities that they did not enjoy. Additionally, participants commented on how personality affected not only what employees do and do not do, but also the way in which employees do it. An example given by one participant is employees who work with a sense of urgency.

Summary

This chapter reported the results of the interviews conducted with six participants from two institutions in the Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma area. Interview results were grouped by research question and corresponding interview questions. Each support staff participant gave seemingly candid responses concerning the registrars' efforts to encourage high levels of motivation among office staff. Furthermore, participants discussed how job duties and

other aspects of the work environment contributed to high and low motivation. This chapter also provided findings from the six documents and artifacts that were analyzed. Findings were organized by institution and then by each document or artifact. While participants' experiences and opinions are diverse, and even contradictory at times, all participants agreed that job duties, the registrars' behaviors, and the work environment impacted motivation in some way, either positively or negatively. Three major themes, connections with others, shared goals and purpose, and employee personality emerged from multiple rounds of coding and were discussed in this chapter. Now that the findings have been thoroughly described, Chapter 5 provides discussion, conclusions, recommendations for registrars, recommendations for future research, and concludes with a brief summary.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how job duties, work processes, elements of the work environment, and leadership styles are related to the motivation of support staff who work in the Office of the Registrar. Furthermore, I sought to identify any disconnect between what support staff need and want from registrars pertaining to motivation and the registrars' behaviors to encourage high levels of motivation.

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to answer the research question guiding the study: What motivates support staff in the Office of the Registrar? This study also attempts to answer the following subquestions:

1. How do participants describe their personal motivation level, the motivation levels of their coworkers, and the motivation levels of their support staff?
2. How do participants view the job duties/work processes they (or their support staff) perform in relation to motivation?
3. How do participants view elements of the work environment (compensation, financial incentives, relationships, recognition, etc.) in relation to motivation?
4. How do participants view leadership styles and behaviors in relation to motivation?

Chapter 5 will review the findings of this study, describe the conclusions drawn from the findings, explain the relevancy to the conceptual framework, and offer recommendations for future practice and research. This chapter closes with a brief summary.

Discussion

With the results of the interviews and document analysis described in detail in the previous chapter, this section will summarize the findings for each research question. Responses

from both institutions and participant types, either support staff or registrar, are combined in the summaries for each research question.

Research Question 1: How do participants describe their personal motivation level, the motivation levels of their coworkers, and the motivation levels of their support staff?

Overall, participants considered their personal motivation levels and those of other support staff members in the office to be good. Several participants noted the effects, both positive and negative, of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on motivation levels. Motivation, according to study participants, can be determined by an individual's attitude and behavior. Participants said that high motivation is indicated by helping coworkers when needed, following policies and procedures, and a positive attitude. Conversely, participants said that complaining, not taking initiative, and not completing assigned duties and responsibilities are signs of low motivation.

Most participants mentioned that helping others and serving students were motivators, which corresponds with the findings from several studies (Hirt, Strayhorn, Amelink, & Bennett, 2006; Eberhardie, 2006; Gansemer-Topf, Von Haden, and Pegg, 2014) and with Maslow's (1954) belonging and esteem needs. A few participants mentioned increased stress and pressure that accompany office peak times, but stated that support staff were able to maintain high levels of motivation during these times. Although lower levels of motivation were reported during slow times in the office, participants said that they still had motivation to find something worthwhile to occupy their time. This finding supports the results from Velasco (2017), who found that one-third of participants responded to boredom with seeking something meaningful to do in the workplace.

Research Question 2: How do participants view the job duties/work processes they (or support staff) perform in relation to motivation?

Several participants spoke about the link between personality and motivation. Support staff members described how they were motivated by tasks that aligned with their strengths and interests, and both registrars indicated that they strove to assign responsibilities based upon what individuals like to do and are capable of doing well. This finding is in line with the recommendations from Bunis (2006), who showed that rearranging job duties which catered to employees' strengths improved motivation and job satisfaction. This finding is also supported by Pace (2011), who discovered that registrars recognized the value and importance of matching job duties with personality strengths.

Unsurprisingly, many participants identified low level, repetitive, and high volume tasks such as processing the office's mail and scanning documents into the electronic records system as sources of low motivation. This finding contradicts Hertzberg (1966), who asserted that when participants were dissatisfied, they were dissatisfied because of the work environment and not the actual work being performed. One participant mentioned the lack of respect, cooperation, and support from faculty which she said contributed to low motivation levels among the office staff. This remark echoed the findings from Waters, M. & Hightower (2016) who found that the lack of respect from faculty prevented the registrar from being viewed as an institutional leader. Furthermore, this participant's perspective matches Maslow's (1954) esteem needs, which involves recognition, acceptance, a sense of value to others, and respect.

Research Question 3: How do participants view elements of the work environment (compensation, financial incentives, relationships, recognition, etc.) in relation to motivation?

1.a: Professional development opportunities

Several participants said that professional development was a motivator. One registrar viewed professional development as so valuable and motivating that she made it a requirement for her staff. Although participants in this study expressed the need for ongoing training, an interest in being involved with their state organization for registrars, and the desire to attend professional conferences and workshops, they were disappointed that these opportunities were limited due to financial circumstances. These findings regarding professional development relate to Maslow's (1954) self-actualization needs. Professional development and growth opportunities often allow individuals to stay up-to-date with trends, changes, and new initiatives in higher education, and therefore may assist individuals in reaching their full potential.

1.b: Staffing level of the office

Four of the participants in this study viewed their office as understaffed due to budget issues and said that motivation declined as a result. Participants described how unfilled positions meant that they had to take on additional work. Absorbing more responsibilities, participants said, contributed to higher stress and frustration. More work and working with more energy can negatively affect individuals' health and personal relationships as found by van Beek et al. (2012). One registrar described how this stress and frustration was physically evident in her staff. Her remarks are in line with Maslow's (1954) physiological needs; when individuals are stressed and frustrated that their bodies are affected in the way that the registrar described, they may have difficulty relaxing and getting the rest that they need. Their physical and mental health may suffer as a result. Participants also mentioned that customer service was negatively affected. Being unable to respond to customer inquiries and needs as quickly as they had in the past was discouraging for not only office staff but students, faculty, and other members of the campus community as well.

1.c: Relationships

All participants agreed that relationships with staff inside the office and with other personnel on campus affect motivation. As Basford and Offermann (2012) found, participants said that positive work relationships contribute to office productivity, job satisfaction, and employee retention. This finding also agrees with Maslow's (1954) needs for love and belonging; however, it does not align with Herzberg (1966) who did not include relationships in his list of factors that influence job satisfaction and motivation. Although most participants described harmonious working relationships among staff in the office, some tension and conflict were noted. Interestingly, two participants connected tension and conflict with the demographic makeup of the staff, saying that disagreements were to be expected because all of the staff in the office were women. Participants were quick to note that office staff desired positive relationships and that they were motivated to resolve differences and make amends when conflict occurred. Participants indicated that while staff members were friendly with each other and socialized while at work, they did not spend time together with each other outside of working hours. Participants also mentioned that staff shared information about their lives with each other, such as hobbies, pets, family members, and events in their lives.

1.d: Internal organizational structure

Surprisingly, several participants spoke about the organizational structure of the office and its role in employee motivation. Although the two institutions involved with this study had a similar organizational structure, participants' opinions varied considerably. Both institutions' organizational structure consisted of a registrar, an associate/assistant registrar level which reported directly to the registrar, and then support staff who were supervised by the associate/assistant registrar. Participants from ABC University held positive views of the

organizational structure, describing how it took some of the pressure off of the registrar and prepared staff for leadership. Conversely, XYZ University participants expressed dissatisfaction with the organizational structure, stating that the associate registrar's lack of knowledge and experience was demotivating. XYZ University participants described how they were so demotivated by the associate registrar that they often bypassed her altogether and went directly to the registrar when they needed assistance. The XYZ University registrar talked at length about this problem and her plans for eliminating the associate registrar's supervisory responsibilities because the impact on motivation levels was so severe. Comments from XYZ University participants support Herzberg's (1966) theory that supervisory style, a hygiene factor, leads to dissatisfaction if it is perceived as inadequate.

1.e: Office mission

As Plemons (2014) found, most support staff participants were unaware of the office mission. However, several participants described themselves and their coworkers as being motivated by common goals and a shared purpose. These goals include serving students and the campus community, maintaining academic records, conferring degrees, performing processes and functions that allow students to progress through their degree programs, and helping others. This finding supports several of Maslow's (1954) needs including: self-actualization, love and belongingness, and esteem

In addition to revealing support staff's lack of knowledge regarding an office mission, this study found that registrars may mistakenly believe that they do an adequate job of articulating the mission to their staff and using it as a tool to encourage high levels of motivation. The registrar from one institution said that the mission had been discussed recently in the office however, the support staff participant from her institution was unsure if the office had a mission.

One support staff participant from the second institution involved in the study said that the mission was periodically discussed in the office, but the registrar did not place much emphasis on it or encourage staff to think about how their jobs relate to the broader goals of the institution.

1.f: Financial compensation and incentives

Participants held mixed opinions on the effects of financial compensation and incentives on motivation levels. While they said that wage increases and bonuses could be motivating, there were several disadvantages to them as well. Multiple participants stated that pay raises and bonuses were rarely given, but when they did receive an increase in pay or a bonus, the amount was too low in proportion to their workload and contributions to the institution. Participants described feeling demotivated when raises and bonuses were applied unequally across campus. Merit pay was mentioned as a motivator, but participants said that their institutions did not offer merit pay to its employees. They also noted that although receiving an increase in pay could be motivating at first, it may be short-lived. Several participants stated that the low starting salary for support staff on campus was demotivating and made it difficult to recruit and retain quality employees in the office. These findings are related to Maslow's (1954) safety and security needs, as the financial remuneration a job provides allows an individual to secure basic needs such as shelter, food, and clothing. These findings also support Herzberg's (1966) theory that an inadequate salary can lead to job dissatisfaction and demotivation.

1.g: Cross-training

Only a few participants identified cross-training as an element of the work environment that has an impact on motivation. All of these participants found cross-training to be motivating and wanted more of it in the office. Participants agreed that it was a challenge to find time for cross-training and suggested that the registrar create a plan and a schedule for the staff to devote

to it. This finding is in line with Pace's (2011) research, which found that in an ideal world, registrars envisioned having the time and resources to make cross-training a priority.

Participants said that cross-training helped them feel more confident and gave them the ability to see the bigger picture, which supports Maslow's (1954) esteem and self-actualization needs.

However, participants also mentioned that cross-training could actually be demotivating.

Participants described feeling demotivated when they are cross-trained on someone else's duties but no one is trained on their duties. Returning from work after a long absence was difficult, participants said, because of the amount of work that they knew they would be coming back to.

1.h: Fringe benefits

Participants did not spend much time discussing fringe benefits. Although they agreed that perks such as tuition discounts, paid time off, free or reduced membership to campus recreation centers, and participation in the state retirement system can be motivators, they viewed them as having an insignificant effect on motivation levels. One participant mentioned that when changes are made to fringe benefits or they are eliminated altogether motivation may decline, as was the case recently on her campus when the institution stopped fully funding health insurance. This participant's comments support Herzberg's (1966) theory that inadequate fringe benefits lead to job dissatisfaction and demotivation.

1.i: Teamwork

A team environment was identified as a motivator, with multiple participants discussing how staff in the office helped each other when needed. Although participants acknowledged that there were times when coworkers could not assist them when asked, they said that motivation did not suffer because their request for help was turned down. A few participants mentioned feeling motivated when they witnessed the registrar assisting with low level tasks during busy periods.

These tasks included filing papers, covering the front desk, or performing basic functions such as processing add/drop forms. Teamwork involves relationships and a sense of belonging, which is Maslow's (1954) third level of needs.

1.j: Other elements mentioned by participants

The absence of succession planning, opportunities for career advancement, and discussion of professional aspirations were other elements of the work environment that were identified as having a negative impact on motivation levels. This finding agrees with Tull (2006), who found that job satisfaction and motivation were correlated with discussions with supervisors regarding long-term career goals and the identification of the knowledge and skills necessary for staff to advance. Support staff mentioned that it was discouraging to feel that the only way to advance one's career seemed to be to leave the Office of the Registrar for a position in another department on campus or leave the university altogether. This finding is in line with Maslow's (1954) self-actualization needs, in which individuals desire to achieve their full potential.

Participants from one of the institutions involved in the study described how motivation levels improved when a new registrar was appointed. Previously, the registrar position was combined with the director of financial aid position. Multiple participants said that after the position was split in two and the associate registrar was promoted to registrar, staff felt more empowered and connected and productivity increased. This finding contradicts Herzberg (1966), who did not include supervisory style as a motivating factor.

Research Question 4: How do participants view leadership styles and behaviors in relation to motivation?

1.a: Praise, recognition, expressing appreciation

All participants agreed that sincere praise, recognition, and appreciation contribute to high levels of motivation, which corresponds with Maslow's (1954) esteem and love and belonging needs. However, they did not agree on the amount and frequency that was given. Responses from support staff varied significantly when compared to registrars' responses. Interestingly, almost all support staff participants stated that the registrars did not give praise, recognition, or appreciation often or that it was not given at all. In contrast, both registrars reported that they regularly expressed appreciation by saying "thank you" or by buying lunch for the staff. Several support staff participants mentioned that they wanted more compliments not only from the registrar but from senior administrators as well. Martin, Porter, and Tankersley (2016) found that more than 70% of respondents from a mix of private and public institutions received praise, recognition, and appreciation. Results also showed that staff employed at private institutions received a significantly higher amount of recognition for their work than staff employed at public institutions (Martin, Porter, and Tankersley, 2016). As the two institutions involved with this study were both public institutions, this finding reveals that support staff in the Office of the Registrar at public institutions may not be receiving an adequate amount of recognition, praise, and appreciation.

1.b: Communication

Registrars and their support staff perceived communication as a positive influence on motivation, which supports the findings of a similar study that focused on morale in the Office of the Registrar (Plemons, 2014). This finding contradicts Herzberg's (1966) theory that supervisory style is not a motivating factor. Support staff participants agreed that the registrars communicated effectively which helped maintain high motivation levels. Participants discussed various communication methods (phone, instant messaging, text, in-person conversations, email,

video conferencing, etc.) and support staff members described registrars tailoring their methods of communication based on the situation and the staff's preferences. Participants also spoke about the content of the information; support staff members said that the registrars did a good job of passing along important news and announcements from across campus. The timing was also mentioned, with support staff participants saying that the registrars often gave advance warning to help them prepare for changes about to occur or questions that they may start receiving. These findings regarding communication are related to Maslow's (1954) self-actualization needs, as individuals may not be able to achieve their full potential without having necessary information. Finally, the only aspect of communication discussed by participants that generated negative comments was the frequency of communication. One participant voiced the opinion that staff meetings were held too often, which resulted in her feeling frustrated with the repetitive information and conversations.

1.c: Empowering staff

Support staff participants reported being motivated by the power to make decisions, exercise control over their work, and find solutions to problems on their own. This finding supports Bunis's (2006) assertion that the ability to delegate is a critical skill for a registrar. Mirroring Bunis's (2006) position, both registrars commented on the delicate balance of empowering employees and micromanaging them, saying that being too extreme on either end of the spectrum would negatively impact motivation. This finding contradicts Herzberg's (1966) theory that supervisory style is not a motivating factor. Although they were appreciative of the freedom that the registrars gave them, support staff members acknowledged that there had been times when they felt that they had been given too much autonomy. Support staff participants reported lower motivation during these times, as they felt like the amount of interaction,

attention, and guidance from the registrar was not enough. This finding supports Herzberg (1966), who asserted that inadequate supervision leads to job dissatisfaction and demotivation.

1.d: Providing support

All support staff participants agreed that they received support from the registrars which they found to be motivating. One participant mentioned that she was motivated to do her best on a task that she had recently been assigned to oversee. Knowing that the registrar was keeping a watchful, supportive eye on her as she adjusted to this new responsibility motivated her to do a good job. She indicated that she wanted the registrar to be proud of her. Other participants reported that having a supportive supervisor to go to for all types of issues helped keep them motivated. Two participants from the same institution said that they felt comfortable approaching the registrar to discuss both professional and personal matters, describing how the registrar's non-judgmental and sympathetic nature made it easy for them to talk to her. Support staff participants also said that they felt that the two registrars would advocate for them and defend them, even when they were wrong or had made a mistake.

Both registrars echoed their support staff's comments, saying that they encouraged open and honest conversations which allowed them to fully support their staff. Registrars mentioned that part of this support included flexibility, creativity, and the willingness to try new things, such as rearranging job duties. These findings align with several of Maslow's (1954) needs of: esteem, love and belonging, safety and security, and self-actualization.

1.e: Teambuilding activities and social events

Participants discussed teambuilding activities and social events in their offices and viewed them as having a positive impact on motivation, which agree with Maslow's (1954) love and belonging needs. The more extraverted participants reported that their motivation levels had

been lower during the COVID-19 pandemic because the opportunities to interact in person with coworkers were limited or absent altogether. Participants viewed teambuilding activities as motivating because they allowed them to build relationships with each other, understand one another better, and bond as a team. Participants expressed disappointment that it was difficult to hold teambuilding activities as often as they would like.

Almost every participant mentioned celebrating birthdays by gathering in the back area of the office for a few moments to have cake or other type of food. Participants also reported Christmas gift exchanges, decorating the office for holidays, holiday parties, and office potlucks. Participants discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic forced them to rethink social events; they created activities such as a recipe exchange through email and virtual coffee hours to mimic “water cooler” talk. While participants reported being social with their coworkers while at work, they did not socialize with each other outside of the office.

1.f: Feedback

Participants reported that feedback was a powerful motivator, which supports Tull’s (2006) findings that staff who engaged in frequent discussion of their performance with a supervisor and who received frequent informal feedback regarding their performance from others in the workplace had low turnover intentions, felt motivated, and were satisfied with their jobs. Support staff members said that they welcomed feedback from registrars, whether it be positive or negative. Although some support staff members described receiving an adequate amount of feedback from registrars, others mentioned a mismatch between the amount of feedback that they need and the amount of feedback they receive from the registrar. These participants said that they were comfortable soliciting feedback from the registrar when they felt that they were not receiving enough feedback.

In addition to focusing on the amount of feedback, participants discussed the style in which the registrar gave feedback, particularly negative feedback. One registrar described how she tried to give negative feedback in a gentle, encouraging way, and by focusing on the future instead of on any past mistakes that had been made. Support staff in her office appreciated this approach, saying that this made the negative feedback easier to accept, which in turn helped keep them motivated. These findings agree with Maslow's (1954) esteem, self-actualization, and love and belonging needs.

Conclusions

Overall, participants in this research study said that the motivation levels of support staff in their offices were good, even though they did acknowledge that at times it was challenging to maintain high motivation levels. Participants recognized that motivation levels were affected by numerous factors which included leadership styles and strategies, certain time periods within the year, workloads, elements of the work environment, and job duties. Some participants astutely pointed out that personality plays a strong role in determining an individual's motivation level.

The six participants involved in this study were not very diverse. They were, as previously described, all female. Five were White, and one participant was Black. Age was the only demographic characteristic in which they differed significantly, with participants ranging from their twenties into their sixties. Although findings and conclusions are not invalidated by the lack of diversity, future researchers looking to build upon the results of this study may seek to involve individuals who are more diverse. Support staff who are male or of color may report higher or lower motivation levels than the White female staff members in this study. Furthermore, men and people of color may report feeling motivated by different elements of the work environment and different leadership behaviors of the registrar.

It was sheer chance that this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forced the design of this study to be slightly altered. Interviews were changed from face to face to virtual. I had originally planned to travel to each campus to conduct interviews in participants' work environments. Plans for collecting data through a third method, observations of the registrar interacting with support staff, were eliminated. The pandemic was at its peak in December 2020 and January 2021 when data was collected through interviews and document analysis. Half of the participants were still working remotely from their homes during this time, either full time or working a "one week at home, one week on campus" staggered schedule with others in the office. Other participants had recently returned to the office after working from home for approximately three months. Undoubtedly, the pandemic strongly influenced study results. This study was able to capture how registrars and their staff adapted to work during the pandemic and gives a unique perspective on employee motivation.

Relevancy to Conceptual Framework

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory were the two theories that guided this study. Study results both aligned with and contradicted each of these theories in some way. Overall, results matched Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs more closely than Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory.

In line with Maslow's five basic needs, support staff participants expected to be treated with respect from students, faculty, Office of the Registrar management staff, and other members of the campus community. Results of this study showed that participants desired esteem, love, and belonging through their relationships with colleagues inside and outside of the office. In order to achieve self-actualization, results showed a need for participants to engage in professional development and growth opportunities. Such opportunities would allow them to

network with colleagues from other institutions and stay abreast of changes, trends, and new initiatives in higher education. Results also showed that participants felt their physiological and security needs were threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants expressed concerns about their personal health in the workplace and fear and anxiety regarding how their institutions' financial situations would affect them personally as well as the office as a whole.

Herzberg's Motivation-Hygiene Theory also provided a theoretical framework for this study. In Figure 1.2, the motivating and demotivating factors that impact employees' decisions to leave or stay in a workplace are depicted. However, results of this study showed that Office of the Registrar support staff job dissatisfaction was not limited to environmental factors as Herzberg theorized. Office of the Registrar support staff job dissatisfaction/demotivation included more than company policies, supervision, work conditions, salary, status, security, and relationship with supervisor and peers. Employee dissatisfaction/demotivation in this study included uncooperative and unappreciative faculty, low level tasks, and lack of cross-training. Office of the Registrar support staff job satisfaction/motivation included more than achievement, recognition, work, responsibility, advancement, and growth. Employee job satisfaction/motivation in this study included relationships with coworkers, fun in the workplace, and feeling empowered to make decisions and exercise control over work.

Recommendations for Registrars

By examining support staff and registrars' experiences and perceptions regarding motivation, this study uncovered multiple topics and areas where the participants agreed and disagreed. This section will provide suggestions for Office of the Registrar leaders to reduce or eliminate the gap between what support staff need and want in terms of motivation and the behavior of leaders in the office.

First, registrars must be aware of the impact of praise, recognition, and appreciation on motivation. Support staff participants said that they craved genuine, regular praise from the registrar to help keep them motivated. Furthermore, this study revealed that support staff and registrars differed in their perceptions of praise, with registrars reporting that they gave frequent praise and support staff saying that registrars did not give praise on a regular basis or that they did not give praise at all. This finding might mean that registrars are giving praise, recognition, and appreciation but not in a form that support staff members are able to interpret. One recommendation is for registrars to ask support members directly how they would like to be praised and recognized.

Second, registrars should consider how the office's organizational structure affects employee motivation. This study revealed that staff from two institutions with a similar organizational structure differed significantly in terms of motivation. Although an associate/assistant registrar position that supervises support staff can provide many benefits, it may negatively impact support staff's motivation levels. Registrars should strive to work together as a team with their associate/assistant registrar, ensure that the associate/assistant registrar is fully trained in all areas of the office, and ensure that individuals hired into the associate/assistant registrar position who supervise others have the skills to do so.

Because this research discovered that almost all of support staff members were not familiar with the office mission, registrars should do more to incorporate the mission into the office's day to day activities. To encourage ownership and representation from all of the areas within the office, all staff members should be consulted and have input into the creation of a mission. Registrars should ensure that regular conversations take place about the meaning and

purpose of the office mission and ask staff to reflect on how their daily duties and responsibilities connect to the office mission.

Next, this study found that support staff and registrars acknowledged that the motivation to perform tasks often depended on a person's personality. Participants noted that extraverted employees may be motivated by responsibilities such as working the front desk, conducting training sessions, and assisting at special events such as commencement. Introverted employees may prefer to work behind the scenes by programming degree audits, maintaining the catalog, and testing software upgrades and patches. Therefore, when assigning job duties, registrars should keep employees' strengths, interests, and personalities in mind.

Finally, registrars must understand the importance of relationships among the office staff. Support staff participants reported that good relationships with others in the office helped keep them motivated. Registrars should provide multiple opportunities for staff to develop and sustain positive relationships, such as teambuilding exercises, cross-training, and creating teams of individuals who may not regularly interact with each other. Registrars should also recognize that socializing in the office during downtimes may not mean that employees are being lazy; rather, staff may be using these times to make connections with one another.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to Office of the Registrar personnel from two regional, public, four-year, non-system affiliated institutions in the Four State Area (Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma) with a student population of no more than 10,000. Because of how this study was designed and the specific population that was examined, there are numerous possibilities for future researchers to expand upon the research done in this study.

First, future researchers could build upon this study by examining institutions with a variety of types, missions, sizes, locations, and internal organizational structures. Exploration of the motivation of Office of the Registrar support staff in private colleges and universities, vocational and technical schools, historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, community colleges, religious institutions, and for-profit institutions would be an expansion of this study. The two randomly selected institutions involved in this study had a student population of less than 7,000. Future researchers could focus on institutions with smaller or larger student enrollment. The two institutions involved with this study were located in relatively small rural cities in different states. Future researchers could direct their attention to urban institutions, suburban institutions, institutions in the same state, and institutions in different regions of the country.

Second, this study employed a qualitative approach, using interviews and document analysis to collect data from two institutions. Future studies could make use of other qualitative methods, such as observation and focus groups, or concentrate on a single case. Additionally, a quantitative or mixed methods approach could be used. Surveys would allow future researchers to greatly expand the number of individuals from which data is collected.

A third recommendation is for future research to focus on the placement of the Office of the Registrar on the organizational chart and the relationship to employee motivation. At some institutions, the Office of the Registrar reports to the student affairs division; at other institutions, the Office of the Registrar is under the academic affairs umbrella. The Office of the Registrar may also be considered part of an enrollment services division.

Next, future researchers could replicate this study but focus on support staff in another enrollment services department such as bursar, financial aid, advising, or admissions. Another

option would be to study a combination of support staff from multiple enrollment services departments.

Finally, instead of examining support staff, future research could involve employees who hold higher ranking positions within the Office of the Registrar or enrollment services departments. Professional staff members and assistant/associate directors may offer different perspectives than the support staff members involved with this study.

Summary

The final chapter of this dissertation study included a summary of the interview and document analysis results and the conclusions drawn from the results. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which occurred during this study and the unique insights it provided on employee motivation was mentioned. The relevancy of the results of the study to the conceptual framework was discussed. Additionally, recommendations were made for registrars who strive to encourage and keep support staff members motivated. Several recommendations were also made for future researchers who may wish to expand upon the work done in this study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Authorization for Study



To: April Michelle Martin
HUNT 146

From: Douglas James Adams, Chair
IRB Expedited Review

Date: 06/22/2020

Action: Expedited Approval

Action Date: 06/18/2020

Protocol #: 2003253886A001

Study Title: A Multicase Study Exploring the Motivation of Support Staff in the Office of the Registrar

Expiration Date: 03/19/2021

Last Approval Date: 06/18/2020

The above-referenced protocol has been approved following expedited review by the IRB Committee that oversees research with human subjects.

If the research involves collaboration with another institution then the research cannot commence until the Committee receives written notification of approval from the collaborating institution's IRB.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without Committee approval. Please submit continuation requests early enough to allow sufficient time for review. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study closure.

Adverse Events: Any serious or unexpected adverse event must be reported to the IRB Committee within 48 hours. All other adverse events should be reported within 10 working days.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, study personnel, or number of participants, please submit an amendment to the IRB. All changes must be approved by the IRB Committee before they can be initiated.

You must maintain a research file for at least 3 years after completion of the study. This file should include all correspondence with the IRB Committee, original signed consent forms, and study data.

cc: Suzanne McCray, Investigator

Appendix B: First Email to Potential Participants

Hello,

I am writing regarding my dissertation research through the University of Arkansas. I am the Assistant Registrar at Missouri Southern State University and am studying the motivation of support staff in the Office of the Registrar, e.g. individuals who hold the title of Registrar's Assistant, Student Services Representative, Graduation Specialist, Enrollment Specialist, Transfer Credit Specialist, or Administrative Assistant. The purpose of this study is to examine how support staff perceive their work environment, job duties, and the registrar's leadership style as influences on their motivation. Additionally, through this study, I will gather information from registrars to determine if there is a disconnect between how support staff prefer to be motivated and the strategies used by registrars.

A combination of interviews and document review will be used in this study. If you are willing to participate, please reply to this email no later than Wednesday, November 18. All information collected as a part of this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

Please contact me at ammarti@uark.edu if you are interested in participating in the study or if you would like more information.

I look forward to hearing from you.

April Martin, Doctoral Student
University of Arkansas

Appendix C: Follow Up Email to Potential Participants

Hello,

This is a follow up message regarding my dissertation research through the University of Arkansas. As mentioned in the email I sent last week, I am the Assistant Registrar at Missouri Southern State University and am studying the motivation of support staff in the Office of the Registrar.

If you are willing to participate, please reply to this email no later than Monday, November 23. All information collected as a part of this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

Please contact me at ammarti@uark.edu if you are interested in participating in the study or if you would like more information.

I look forward to hearing from you.

April Martin, Doctoral Student
University of Arkansas

Appendix D: Confirmation Email to Participants

Hello,

First of all, thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research through the University of Arkansas. As mentioned in the previous email, I am the Assistant Registrar at Missouri Southern State University and am studying the motivation of support staff in the Office of the Registrar. I am pleased that you have agreed to participate in the study and I look forward to meeting you!

As mentioned previously, the purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of how support staff perceive their work environment, job duties, and the registrar's leadership style as influencing their motivation. Additionally, through this study, I will gather information from registrars to determine if there is a disconnect between how support staff prefer to be motivated and the strategies used by registrars.

The anticipated timeframe for the study is December 2020 and January 2021. You will be asked to participate in at least one one-on-one recorded interview with me and provide at least one document for review. Each interview is expected to last from 45 – 60 minutes. All information collected as a part of this study will be kept confidential.

Please contact me at ammarti@uark.edu if you have questions about this study.

April Martin, Doctoral Student
University of Arkansas

Appendix E: Interview Guide (Supervisors)

Thank the participant to consenting to the interview. Review the informed consent form, the purpose of the interview, and remind the participant of their control over the interview.

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about the job duties that support staff within your office perform.
2. How would you describe the current motivation levels of support staff?
3. What “clues” would indicate to you that a support staff member has a high or low level of motivation?
4. How would you describe the motivation levels of support staff during office peak times? During slow times?
5. What specific duties and tasks that support staff perform cause high and low motivation levels?
6. What elements of the work environment (compensation, financial incentives, relationships, recognition, etc.) contribute to high levels of motivation? Which of these elements does your work environment contain? Why or why not?
7. What strategies do you use to encourage high levels of motivation for support staff? Are there any strategies that you are not utilizing that you would like to utilize? What are they and why?
8. Is there anything else you would like me to know about the motivation levels of support staff in your office that I have not asked already?

Thank the participant for their time. Remind the participant that consent may be withdrawn at any time and that they will be asked to review the transcript of the interview for accuracy. Read the Verbal Request for Documents script to the participant.

Appendix F: Interview Guide (Staff)

Thank the participant to consenting to the interview. Review the informed consent form, the purpose of the interview, and remind the participant of their control over the interview.

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about the job duties that you perform.
2. How would you describe your current motivation level? How would you describe the motivation levels of fellow support staff in your office?
3. What “clues” would indicate to you that a support staff member has a high or low level of motivation?
4. How would you describe your motivation level during office peak times? How would you describe the motivation levels of fellow support staff during office peak times? During slow times?
5. What specific duties and tasks that you perform cause high and low motivation levels? What specific duties and tasks that your fellow support staff perform cause high and low motivation levels?
6. What elements of the work environment (compensation, financial incentives, relationships, recognition, etc.) contribute to high levels of motivation for you and your fellow support staff? Which of these elements does your work environment contain? Why or why not?
7. What strategies does the registrar use to encourage high levels of motivation for support staff? Are there any strategies that the registrar is not utilizing that you would them to utilize? What are they and why?
8. Is there anything else you would like me to know about the motivation levels of support staff in your office that I have not asked already?

Thank the participant for their time. Remind the participant that consent may be withdrawn at any time and that they will be asked to review the transcript of the interview for accuracy. Read the Verbal Request for Documents script to the participant.

Appendix G: Informed Consent Form (Supervisors)

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted through the University of Arkansas under the direction of my dissertation chair, Dr. Suzanne McCray. This study will explore how support staff perceive their work environment, job duties, and the registrar's leadership style as influencing their motivation.

This research study is part of my dissertation and will provide insight to Office of the Registrar managers on how support staff perceive leadership styles and strategies used to encourage high motivation. Additionally, this research will show how what characteristics and behaviors support staff look for to identify coworkers with high or low levels of motivation.

You will participate in at least one 45-60 minute interview. During the interview(s) I will ask you to describe your leadership style and the strategies you use to encourage high levels of motivation among your staff. I will also ask about how the work environment and the job duties support staff perform affect their motivation. The interview will be digitally recorded for accuracy. You will be asked to review the transcript to confirm that it is an accurate record of your remarks. You will also have the opportunity to submit documents that you select for analysis for evidence of your leadership style.

All interviews and document analysis will be conducted during December 2020 and January 2021.

This study presents no foreseeable risks to you. You understand that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research studies, and you believe that reasonable precautions have been taken to minimize any risk to you.

Other than the personal benefit that may come as a result of answering interview questions regarding leadership, there is no direct benefit for participating. No compensation will be offered for participating in this project. In a broader sense, you will contribute to a greater understanding of the attitudes employees have toward motivation.

All interview transcripts, sound files, and other information obtained from participants will be kept confidential to the fullest extent of the law and University policy. Your name and other potentially identifiable information will be changed in the final output of the study. Total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, but your identity and the information you provide will be protected as much as possible. No information gathered from you will be revealed to anyone at your institution.

If you have questions about this study and/or participants' rights, please contact the following individuals at any time:

April Martin (Principal Investigator)
ammarti@uark.edu

Suzanne McCray, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions
Associate Professor of Higher Education
Office of Admissions
Hunt 229A
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479-575-4883
smccray@uark.edu

Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw from this study at any time. At the conclusion of this study you have the right to request feedback about the results.

Signature:

I have read and fully understand this consent form.
I sign it freely and voluntarily. I have received a
copy of this form.

Participant Signature

Date

Appendix H: Informed Consent Form (Staff)

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted through the University of Arkansas under the direction of my dissertation chair, Dr. Suzanne McCray. This study will explore how support staff perceive their work environment, job duties, and the registrar's leadership style as influencing their motivation.

This research study is part of my dissertation and will provide insight to Office of the Registrar managers on how support staff perceive leadership styles and strategies used to encourage high motivation. Additionally, this research will show how what characteristics and behaviors support staff look for to identify coworkers with high or low levels of motivation.

You will participate in at least one 45-60 minute interview. During the interview(s) I will ask you to describe the registrar's leadership style and the strategies used to encourage high levels of motivation. I will also ask about how the work environment and the job duties you perform affect your motivation. The interview will be digitally recorded for accuracy. You will be asked to review the transcript to confirm that it is an accurate record of your remarks. You will also have the opportunity to submit documents that you select for analysis for evidence of the registrar's leadership style.

All interviews and document analysis will be conducted during December 2020 and January 2021.

This study presents no foreseeable risks to you. You understand that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research studies, and you believe that reasonable precautions have been taken to minimize any risk to you.

Other than the personal benefit that may come as a result of answering interview questions regarding leadership, there is no direct benefit for participating. No compensation will be offered for participating in this project. In a broader sense, you will contribute to a greater understanding of the attitudes employees have toward motivation.

All interview transcripts, sound files, and other information obtained from participants will be kept confidential to the fullest extent of the law and University policy. Your name and other potentially identifiable information will be changed in the final output of the study. Total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, but your identity and the information you provide will be protected as much as possible. No information gathered from you will be revealed to anyone at your institution.

If you have questions about this study and/or participants' rights, please contact the following individuals at any time:

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ammarti@uark.edu

Suzanne McCray, Ph.D.
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479-575-4883
smccray@uark.edu

Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw from this study at any time. At the conclusion of this study you have the right to request feedback about the results.

Signature:

I have read and fully understand this consent form.
I sign it freely and voluntarily. I have received a
copy of this form.

Participant Signature

Date