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Should I Stay or Should I Go? Compassion Organizing and  
the University Advancement Workplace

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

by

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December 2021  
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This dissertation is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

Compassion organizing has been described within positive organizational scholarship as an organization's response to pain and suffering in organizational behavior and also the ability for organizations to flourish and promote joy and fulfillment in the workplace. Compassion organizing has been examined in organizational life through the four areas of noticing, feeling, acting, and sense-making. Previous research has focused on business and healthcare workplaces and has shown that compassion organizing is both an organizational and interpersonal social process. Because of the limited existing research on compassion organizing in the higher education workplace (and none with respect to the university advancement workplace), the purpose for conducting this study was to explore the possible effects (if any) of compassion organizing on the university advancement workplace and the voluntary employee turnover and workplace satisfaction of major gift officers within this organization. This study utilized a phenomenological research design to gather information via semi structured interviews from 8 major gift officers within public 4-year higher education institutions. The findings suggested that compassion organizing does play a role in the voluntary turnover of major gift officers in institutional advancement workplaces, especially as it relates to the development employee's relationship and interactions with their supervisors and leaders. Study participants described both positive and negative experiences with compassion organizing in their workplaces as well as specific behaviors and processes that could foster compassion organizing in the institutional advancement department. Further, study participants described the negative and significant effect of the voluntary turnover in the university advancement workplace on the culture and environment of the organization as a whole. The results are important for institutional and departmental leaders to foster and grow a compassionate workplace environment whereby it is

possible to recruit and retain talented major gift officers and foster a positive and flourishing culture that will not experience high rates of voluntary turnover within the development profession and will also increase fundraising success with alumni, donors, and friends of the university.

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*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”  
Nelson Mandela*

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## Dedication

For Drew and Emma, *#TeamSmith*

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## **Chapter I. Introduction**

### **A. Statement of the Problem**

Evidence of fundraising and its considerable impact on the institution of higher education is readily visible to even the most casual observer who steps foot onto the campus of a college or university in the United States. From the more obvious philanthropic examples on university campuses such as named academic buildings, athletic complexes, and residence halls, to the less noticeable but equally significant glimpses of fundraising on campus such as privately-funded student scholarships, gifts of equipment, as well as endowed faculty positions, fundraising is unmistakably vital to the growth and success of our modern higher education institutions (Grace & Leslie, 1990; McClure, Frierson, Hall, and Ostlund, 2017; Weerts, 2007). With the advance of fundraising and philanthropy's role in higher education in the past several decades combined with the declining proportions of state and federal funding for public colleges and universities, the profession of development (university advancement) has also seen a dramatic growth as institutions seek to increase private revenue sources to maintain their missions and keep their doors open during these resource-scarce times (Caboni, 2010; Carbone, 1987; Grace & Leslie, 1990; Jacobson, 1990; Kozobarich, 2000; Weerts, 2007).

The university advancement department and the development professionals (in particular, major gift officers, or MGOs) are situated within the very unique organizational context of the higher education institutional culture. Unlike its historical identity as a purely academic beacon of civil discourse with an emphasis on student learning, modern colleges and universities have become increasingly business-minded and focused on profit and return on investment (Cameron & Smart, 1998; Croucher & Lacy, 2020; Giroux, 2002; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Giannakakis, 2020; Sigahi, 2020). This increasingly business-like culture and organization of higher

education has naturally impacted departments within colleges and universities, as well, such as the department of the university advancement office (Waddington, 2016). According to Waddington (2016), the organizational environment in colleges and universities often does not promote a culture whereby compassion could be enabled and promoted. These often-conflictual organizational cultures of higher education institutions with a focus on both academic and business cultures also trickles down to the university advancement department, which is notorious for very high voluntary MGO turnover (Counts & Jones, 2019; Schiller, 2017).

An unfortunate but common trend within the profession of fundraising is the significant rate of turnover and burnout within the field, especially for major gift officers (Counts & Jones, 2019; Schiller, 2017). According to former Vice President for Alumni Relations and Development at the University of Chicago, Ronald J. Schiller (2017), development staff turnover can be costly for the organization and often “disruptive” for the relationship between the donor and the institution (p.1). In turn, Schiller (2017) wrote that the unfortunate result of the turnover of university advancement staff is “delayed or decreased giving” to the institution. Schiller (2017) found that an important way to counteract the negative impacts of MGO turnover within an institution is to include and coordinate with as many colleagues as is feasible in the practice of maintaining and cultivating donors and their relationship with the institution. There is, however, a constant demand for fundraisers as well as a plethora of well-paying, steady jobs in university advancement departments due to the increasing need for private funding and philanthropy to support colleges and universities (Counts & Jones, 2019). In addition, the organizational culture of the university advancement workplace is rife with pressures and metrics for MGOs and, similar to the competing academic and business cultures located within institutions of higher



education as a whole, can potentially lead to workplace environments with higher MGO voluntary turnover and that may not encourage nor promote a culture of compassion organizing.

Over the past two decades there has been a remarkable growth in research and investigation into what Frost (1999) first termed “compassion organizing” within organizational behavior and cultural studies, and especially within the field of positive organizational scholarship (see, e.g., Denney, 2020; Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014; Kanov, Maitlis, Worline, Dutton, Frost, & Lilius, 2004; Simpson, Farr-Wharton, & Reddy, 2020). Scholars have responded to Frost’s (1999) call to study compassion in organizational life, and, notably, Dutton et al. (2006) studied and wrote a model of compassion organizing about the specific action-oriented components of this organizational behavior. In particular, Dutton et al.’s (2006) compassion organizing model includes an organization’s responses, roles, routines, and processes to unanticipated and painful events within its membership via the elements of noticing, feeling, acting, and sense-making. Despite the significant progression of studies in both qualitative and quantitative research on the topic of compassion organizing, much of the literature to date has focused on the healthcare and business sectors, and there are only a handful of qualitative studies on compassion organizing within the higher education institutional context in particular (Denney, 2020; Dutton et al., 2006; Frost et al., 2000; Waddington, 2016; Worline and Dutton, 2017). Furthermore, none of these research studies have examined compassion organizing within the university advancement department in colleges and universities, which is the focus of this paper. These very issues of compassion in the workplace are perhaps what lead many MGOs to ask themselves, *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* and voluntarily leave their university advancement departments for another college or university’s fundraising team, possibly in at least partial pursuit of a compassionate and caring organizational environment.

## **B. Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose for conducting the study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the effect of compassion organizing on voluntary employee turnover and workplace satisfaction with major gift officers working in higher education. Specifically, the study examined the connection between traumatic/painful organizational behavior in the university advancement workplace and their accompanying compassionate responses for a sample of development professionals (major gift officers) in university advancement workplaces. The study also assessed the possible impacts of voluntary major gift officer turnover (or lack of voluntary turnover) on the overall organizational culture of the university advancement workplace.

## **C. Research Questions**

The qualitative study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How did major gift officers who have voluntarily left their roles describe the relationship between compassion at work and their decision to leave an university advancement department?
2. What were the specific organizational processes and behaviors that could foster a compassionate organizing environment for major gift officers in institutional advancement?
3. What, if any, were the possible described impacts of voluntary turnover (or lack of turnover) for major gift officers on the overall organizational culture of the university advancement workplace?

## **D. Assumptions**

The underlying assumptions of the current study were:

1. An institution has a role in the voluntary turnover for major gift officers that can be identified and examined utilizing the conceptual framework of compassion organizing.

2. Compassion organizing is a construct that can be measured qualitatively.
3. Compassion organizing research in higher education institutions is very limited and there is a need for examination of this phenomena within higher education and specifically within institutional advancement departments.
4. Voluntary major gift officer turnover in institutional advancement affects organizational culture and performance, especially fundraising outcomes for the institution.
5. The interview protocol utilized for this study is reliable.

#### **E. Limitations and Delimitations**

The results of the investigation were descriptive and not conclusive. The study has limitations that decreased the confidence and application of its results to other organizations and studies. The primary concerns included a restricted sample because the participants were selected from within a distinct geographic area of the United States (the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, or CASE, southwest district) and thus the customs and socioeconomic factors in this region may have impacted the results and their ability to be generalized across different cultural and organizational contexts.

#### **F. Definition of Terms**

The following terms were operationally defined for the current study:

*University Advancement/University Development:* The connected components of fundraising/development/advancement, advancement services (donor records, gift receipting, and prospect research), public relations, alumni engagement, relations, and publications, and, frequently, marketing and communications within a university and institutional landscape (Acebo, 2008). The main purpose of this department is to secure funds from private sources to

support an institution (Acebo, 2008). The term is used interchangeably with university advancement, university development, institutional advancement, and institutional development.

*Major Gift Officer (MGO)*: The individual who is responsible for raising funds of significant value (amount varies according to institution; typically, this gift amount is larger than an annual gift, such as \$25,000 and above) from individual donors, corporations, and friends of the institution (Kozobarich, 2000). The individual is usually part of a team of frontline fundraisers within a university advancement department who report to a senior development professional and who are responsible for specific annual metrics related to the qualification, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship functions and relationships with private supporters to advance the goals and mission of the institution.

*Voluntary Turnover*: This indicates an individual employee's decision to leave a workplace out of personal volition and without coercion or threat. For the purpose of the investigation, voluntary turnover will be considered to occur within this definition if a major gift officer (MGO) has voluntarily left one institution of higher education and now currently works in a different institution of higher education as an MGO and this turnover event has occurred within the last five (5) years.

*Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS)*: An academic discipline that encompasses multiple theories and seeks to understand the best of the human condition (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 3-4). Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn's foundational book (2003), *Positive Organizational Scholarship*, provides an in-depth overview of the conceptual frameworks, guiding worldviews, and definitions of this new perspective and to compensate for deficits in the current organizational behavior scholarship (p. 4). Further, these researchers sought to describe the positive phenomena associated with an approach to organizational studies in order to bring

attention and empirical research to positive deviance (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, p. 4). Positive organizational scholarship does include biases and these are related to the very terms in its name: positive, organizational, and scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 4-6). The positive bias relates to the research's focus on organizational behavior with respect to positive states, positive deviance and excellence, and phenomena that are "exceptional, virtuous, life-giving, and flourishing" (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 5). The organizational bias refers to an expansion of the organizational studies and stretching their limits to demonstrate the viability of positive states, processes, and relationships (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 5). The scholarship bias indicates that this body of literature goes beyond self-help studies and is committed to rigorous empirical research using the scientific method with a focus on teaching and practical application (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 6).

*Compassion Organizing:* This refers to academic study within the field of positive organizational scholarship that began to flourish with Frost's (1999) seminal work about the importance and needed research of compassion (and its opposite, related phenomena, suffering and pain) in organizational behavior. In response to Frost's (1999) urging, scholars affirmed the importance of compassion scholarship and explored the prevalence of pain and suffering in organizational behavior and life and therefore the importance of compassion and organizational response as both an organizational process and an interpersonal one (Kanov, Maitlis, Worline, Dutton, Frost, & Lilius, 2004; Dutton, Workman, & Hardin, 2014; Simpson, Farr-Wharton, & Reddy, 2020). Compassion organizing originates from the word compassion, which scholars state is not an emotion but a social process with four components: noticing, feeling, acting, and sense-making (Dutton, 2006; Boyatzis, Smith, & Beveridge, 2013; Dutton, et al., 2014; Kanov, 2016; Lilius et al., 2011).

## **G. Significance of the Study**

Turnover in institutional advancement departments in colleges and universities creates a significant financial and cultural toll on both the institution and its supporters (Crouteau, 2009; Hayashida, 2014; Lathrop, 2015). In fact, Woodhouse (2019) cited both a 2011 study that revealed the striking fact that the cost of replacing one development officer was more than \$127,000, as well as a 2018 study by The Work Institute that said the replacement cost for a worker is one-third of that person's salary (p. 32-37). Also, the national average tenure for a development officer is only 18 to 24 months at one institution (Hayashida, 2014; Lathrop, 2015). Unfortunately, voluntary turnover of major gift officers in university advancement workplaces in America continues to persist and serve as a continual source of problems for these departments, institutions, fundraising operations, and their associated donors (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2019; Hayashida, 2014). At its best, university advancement is grounded upon or enhanced by the connections between its fundraisers and the institution's donors, and when these relationships are disrupted by frequent gift officer turnover, the institution is required to rebuild trust and repair relationships with donors (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2019; Hayashida, 2014). This high rate of major gift officer turnover also then naturally creates disturbances in the relationship-building process between the development professionals and prospective donors and thus delays the gift closure potential for the institution as well (Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2019; Lathrop, 2015; Crouteau, 2009; Hayashida, 2014).

An important component of major gift officer turnover relates to the organizational culture and behavior within which the gift officers work and create meaning and value (Sapra & Mathur, 2020; Association of Fundraising Professionals, 2019; Crouteau, 2009; Hayashida,

2014; Lathrop, 2015). According to Boon, Wynen, and Kleizen (2020), there are psychological motivations related to negative workplace changes and a strong relationship between negatively perceived workplace changes and employee turnover (p. 22-23). As a result of research such as Boon, Wynen, and Kleizen's (2020) and Sapra and Mathur's (2020) that link turnover to employee's perceptions of workplace conditions, community, and climate, the present research will expand upon the conceptual framework of compassion organizing into the university advancement workplace setting.

Compassion organizing and its focus on both organizational suffering and pain coupled with joy and fulfillment in the workplace were utilized in the study to examine the high rate of major gift officer voluntary turnover in university advancement workplaces (Frost, 1999). According to Frost (2003), "while pain is inevitable in organizations, it is often destructive to human beings and their relationships," (p. 59-60) and there are frequently policies and practices within the organizations that create (often unintended and unexpected) toxic conditions. Utilizing the conceptual framework of compassion organizing was important because there is a gap in the literature of organizational studies with respect to an examination of organizational life in university advancement departments. Frost's (1999) seminal work declared that compassion should truly count in organizational studies when he wrote:

There is a whole rich, vibrant, exciting world of understanding about organizational life that is waiting to be engaged, and one of the keys to this engagement is compassion. Compassion counts as a connection to the human spirit and to the human condition. In organizations there is suffering and pain, as there is joy and fulfillment. There is a need for dignity and self-respect in these settings, and to the extent that our theories, models, and practices ignore these dimensions, so do they distort our understanding of life in these enterprises. (p. 131)

Therefore, the completion of the study impacted university advancement departments because it illuminated the implications of compassion organizing and organizational behaviors in relation to

major gift officers' voluntary turnover within these institutions. As a result, the study enables advancement leaders and other decision-makers to create, enhance, or change policies and/or practices within the department to effectively increase the retention and job satisfaction for their major gift officers and thus decrease the rate of voluntary turnover within their units. The completion of the study also filled a gap in the literature within the positive organizational scholarship on compassion organizing as it extended the research to include university advancement workplaces. As Frost (2003) observed "emotions are part of the human condition and thus inherent in any organizational setting, and they have an impact on function and performance. [...] Compassionate managers and compassionate organizations can [...] lead their systems to greater health and better performances" (p. 33).

## **H. Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that was utilized for the study was the theory of compassion organizing which is located within the overarching field of positive organization scholarship in the organizational behavior academic discipline. The field of positive organizational scholarship was explained and supported with rigorous empirical research using the scientific method with a focus on teaching and practical application in Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn's foundational book (2003) *Positive Organizational Scholarship* (p. 6). Positive organizational scholarship provided the unique lens to examine human behavior at work and how this behavior is affected by organizational strategies such as major gift officer voluntary turnover (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 10-11). Compassion organizing emerged as a sub-field within positive organizational scholarship with Frost's (1999) seminal work about the importance and needed research of compassion (and its opposite, related phenomena, suffering and pain) in organizational behavior studies. However, with the exception of studies conducted within



institutions of higher education utilizing academic employee participants and student participants, respectively, by Janse van Rensburg and Rothmann (2020) and Chiesi, Lau, and Saklofske (2020) no other study has investigated the role of compassion organizing and its effect on major gift officer voluntary turnover rates in the university advancement workplace. Therefore, the study utilized and extended the theory of compassion organizing to investigate the role of compassion organizing and its effect on voluntary turnover for major gift officers in university advancement settings.

## **Chapter II. Review of the Literature**

### **A. Introduction**

This chapter investigated the literature relevant to compassion organizing on voluntary employee turnover for MGOs in the higher education context within the university advancement department. Specifically, the literature presented in the chapter with respect to compassion organizing was intended to guide the study's investigation of the voluntary turnover of major gift officers (MGOs) within these institutions. The literature review is provided in three sections: (1) research on the organizational culture of the institution of higher education, (2) research on institutional advancement and development as a profession, and (3) research on compassion organizing. The section concludes with a chapter summary.

The literature for this investigation was obtained from a variety of sources and collected in several ways. The literature was acquired from the institutional libraries of the University of Arkansas as well as the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the majority of the literature came from referred journals or research reports. In addition, research was identified and obtained from the libraries and archives of professional associations, such as the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. Literature was collected from these sources through the use of electronic searches on databases such as Web of Science, Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, ProQuest Central, ERIC, Business Source Elite, and others.

### **B. Organizational Culture of Higher Education**

The institutional advancement department is an organization within another organization (the particular college or university in which the department is located) with its own specific

culture, behavior, unique trends, and routines. According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), an organization is

a coalition of groups and interests, each attempting to obtain something from the collectivity by interacting with others, and each with its own preferences and objectives. The result of these interactions and exchanges is the collectivity we call organization. (p. 36)

In this sense, institutional advancement departments function as organizations with their own culture because they have distinctive preferences, objectives, and groups of professionals who frame their interactions with other organizational members in order to obtain their goals and regulate their organizational norms and behaviors (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Further, Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) wrote about the importance of context for organizations and the “underlying premise of the external perspective on organizations is that organizational activities and outcomes are accounted for by the context in which the organization is embedded” (p. 39). Therefore, the organization’s context and history can affect its responses to environmental and internal demands and thus its evolution as an organization (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 24). Since the university advancement department is located within the context of the college or university where it is embedded, its organizational activities and behaviors are similarly influenced by the history, context, and environment of the higher education institution where it is located (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

The university advancement department is not only defined as an organization, but also as an institution within a college or university institutional environment (Scott, 2014).

According to Scott (2014), institutions such as the development office are “multifaceted, durable social structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources” (p. 49). Further, Scott (2014) wrote an overarching conception of institutions and outlined the following properties of all institutions:

- Institutions are social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience.
- Institutions are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life.
- Institutions are transmitted by various types of carriers, including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines, and artifacts.
- Institutions operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction, from the world system to localized interpersonal relationships.
- Institutions by definition connote stability but are subject to change processes, both incremental and discontinuous. (p. 48)

In this framework and with these definitions in mind, the study provided an exploration of the organizational culture of the unique institution of university advancement and compassion organizing within this context and among these organizational members.

The organizational culture of the university advancement department in higher education refers to the embedded assumptions, values, beliefs, ideologies, and meaning within the organization (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). The organizational culture is distinct from the organization's climate, which refers instead to the current organizational atmosphere and its perceived attitudes and behavior of the organizational members about their organizational life (Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Taken together, Peterson and Spencer (1990) wrote that culture and climate compose a central piece of the internal environment of the organization (p. 6). The organizational culture of the university advancement workplace, therefore, can help guide an understanding of the deeply-held values and beliefs of institutional actors within this department, such as the MGOs. Organizational culture is also very important in assessing an institution's

“compassion competence,” or how normal and routinized the elements and values of compassion organizing (noticing, feeling, acting, and sense-making) are embedded and practiced within the fabric of the workplace (Worline & Dutton, 2017). Specifically, Worline and Dutton (2017) wrote that organizational culture is important to understand compassion competence for the following reasons:

First, organizational cultures teach members basic assumptions about human nature and human relationship [...] A second aspect of culture that is important for compassion competence involves what Edgar Schein calls *espoused* values, an organization’s stated and lived-out ideals, goals, and aspirations. Values that emphasize human worth and human interconnection enable compassion competence. These are often stated in words like *dignity, inclusion, respect, teamwork, collaboration, partnership, support, care, kindness, stewardship, service, justice, and fairness*. (p. 119)

It is with this framework of the university advancement department as both a unique organization and an institution in higher education with its own culture, values, and norms that this paper explored the both the organizational culture of the university advancement workplace and the examination of compassion organizing within this environment and among these organizational members.

### ***Competing Notions of Academic and Business Cultures***

The culture of higher education is unique and has changed significantly in the past several decades with the growth of globalization, neoliberalism philosophies, and the blurring of private and public spheres (Cameron & Smart, 1998; Croucher & Lacy, 2020; Giroux, 2002; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Giannakakis, 2020; Sigahi, 2020). The traditional academic culture of colleges and universities has grown into an increasingly business-like environment with a focus on production, profit, and growing marketization of teaching (Giroux, 2002; Olssen & Peters, 2005). Historically, the academic culture of institutions of higher education was comprised of a culture of “open intellectual enquiry and debate” (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 313) and institutions

were viewed as sites for public discourse and the “development of inclusive democratic public spaces” (Giroux, 2002, p. 432) where the main role of universities was to help students learn (Waddington, 2016). Conversely, the current culture of higher education institutions is one where universities are marketplaces with intense competition for faculty positions, funding, and financial resources, as well as competition for students who are portrayed and valued as consumers (Denney, 2020; Giroux, 2002; Olssen & Peters, 2005). Moreover, Croucher and Lacy (2020) wrote that even faculty research has become marketized in higher education, and the university environment is one “where return on investment has come to supersede the development of new knowledge” (p. 4).

Sigahi (2020) referred to the new culture of universities and colleges as one of an “academic capitalism” (p. 96) phenomenon that celebrates entrepreneurship, management, performance, and rankings for institutions of higher education. Croucher and Lacy (2020) further examined this notion of academic capitalism in their mixed methods investigation of higher education leaders in colleges and universities in Australia. Croucher and Lacy (2020) conducted their research through 116 in-depth interviews and follow-up surveys with Australian higher education leaders and focused on these leaders’ perceptions of the most pressing issues facing Australian higher education for the next one to two decades. Their research identified that one of the key issues cited by leaders as important for the development of institutions in the future is that of academic capitalism and marketization of universities (Croucher & Lacy, 2020, p. 14). Although the study examined universities in Australia, Croucher and Lacy (2020) wrote that these issues also exist in American higher education environments (p. 14). Moreover, the researchers (2020) wrote that that academic leaders in the United States similarly view the increasing business-like emphasis and culture in universities as an important and valuable issue

for the determining the future of these institutions (p. 14). As institutions of higher education struggle to maneuver these competing notions of the academic culture of universities as well as the modern-day business and results-oriented marketplace expectations of universities, conditions may be created within these workplaces that are not suitable for nor encouraging of the promotion of a workplace environment or culture of compassion organizing.

### ***Organizational Values in Higher Education***

Denney (2020) identified that there is a significant lack of research on compassion in higher educational contexts, and so this is an area ripe for investigation and perhaps self-examination by those within the academic environment to truly understand the organizational values within institutions. Worline and Dutton (2017) wrote that an organization's values enable compassion competence and therefore an examination of the current values that are espoused and rewarded within institutions of higher education may illuminate the status of modern-day universities with respect to compassion organizing. Denney (2020) described the climate of the modern university environment as "toxic" and that there is an "entirely preventable but deeply systemic nature of stress and suffering – it is a vicious cycle where everyone in our universities feels pressured, overloaded, and incapable of being compassionate to one another" (p. 45). Further, Worline and Dutton (2017) wrote that workplace suffering and thus a shift in workplace values can come from many areas, including the work itself, downsizing, restructuring, change processes, heavy workloads, performance pressure, disrespectful communications, as well as feelings of being devalued by organizational members (p. 8). Giroux (2002) also described the change of values within university organizations from a public to business mindset and he wrote that "as the boundaries between public values and commercial interests become blurred, many academics appear less as disinterested truth seekers than as operatives for business interests" (p.

433). Giroux (2002) wrote that the expectations for values of academic administrators in modern university organizations are not those with “intellectual reach and civic courage,” (p. 439) but instead as bridge-builders between the business community and the academic world.

Universities are truly facing challenging conditions that once were viewed as only problems in the private sector; in fact, Cameron and Smart (1998) found that “there is as much downsizing and decline in higher education as in business” (p. 66). Furthermore, higher education institutions are both viewed as the savior and the problem of American economic and social issues and are pressured to improve, excel, and increase performance while also manage decreased resources and portions of state and federal budgets (Cameron & Smart, 1998).

All of these organizational conditions, values, and pressures reveal that university workplace morale is often low, staff feel undervalued, overworked, and exploited, and that the business-like values of productivity and performance are at odds with the academic values of inquiry and civil discourse. Also, the competing academic and business cultures within institutions of higher education and university advancement departments create workplace environments that “do not always foster a culture where compassion is honoured” (Waddington, 2016). Although, as Denney (2020) found, the recent coronavirus pandemic has seemingly “lifted the lid on something that was previously unspeakable in academic environments – people’s individual suffering,” (p. 44) much investigation and research is needed to truly understand compassion in higher education in general and university advancement departments in particular.

### **C. Institutional Advancement**

This analysis of the growth of institutional advancement and development as a profession in American public research universities was utilized to examine how the lens of organizational



behavior informs the culture of universities with respect to their fundraising department and employees (Oliver 1991, p. 146). Jacobson (1990) theorized that “the field of institutional advancement has also demonstrated flexibility and adaptiveness in its maturation toward professionalism,” (p. 436) and that influences such as growth in technology and social demands have shaped and changed university advancement programs and operations. The literature in this section was taken from scholarly, peer-reviewed articles, research from practitioners, as well as reports from professional organizations (such as the leading international professional organization for development professionals in higher education, the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* as well as *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*). Scholarly research about institutional advancement is lacking and not particularly broad and therefore this review of literature utilized the highly regarded and legitimate professional organizations and practitioner research in order to provide a fuller picture of the available information.

### ***Brief History of Institutional Advancement***

As public research universities adopted the model of institutional advancement, philanthropy began to take on a much more significant role in the resource development efforts in these institutions. Historically, institutional advancement efforts were primarily limited to private and independent higher education institutions that developed routinized and systematic activities and strategies to solicit voluntary donations to support their institutions (Dale, 2017; Grace & Leslie, 1990). Since public institutions have historically been supported by state and federal funding sources, they have not had to rely on voluntary support through donations and gifts from alumni and friends of the institution to support their functions and operations (Grace

& Leslie, 1990). For the past several decades, higher education institutions have faced increasing financial pressures and challenges to secure both students and resources to support their missions (McClure, Frierson, Hall, & Ostlund, 2017; Weerts, 2007). Specifically, these stresses have occurred in public institutions of higher education since the “golden age” of the 1960’s (Weerts, 2007, p. 80). Moreover, “higher education’s bumpy ride has been attributed to both internal and external forces shaping colleges and universities during the last 25 years” (Weerts, 2007, p. 80). It is the existence and persistence of these mounting difficulties and competition for scarce resources that has led to the growth, professionalization, and sophistication of the institutional advancement field (Caboni, 2010; Carbone, 1987; Grace & Leslie, 1990; Jacobson, 1990; Kozobarich, 2000; Weerts, 2007). Therefore, institutional advancement and development’s growth as a profession in American public research institutions is a significant organizational system to study due to the tremendous impact of these financial challenges and scarce resources and the gap in scholarship related to development as a profession.

Although some scholars may suggest that fruitful fundraising efforts are a result of some combination of creativity and luck, this is not the best way to describe the professional practice of institutional advancement (Carbone, 1987, p. 607). A concise statement that signifies the professional art and science of higher education fundraising was written by Jacobson (1990) and he indicated that institutional advancement is “the management function responsible for maintaining and improving relationships between an educational organization and its publics for their mutual benefit” (p. 434-435). Even more clarification about the role of educational fundraising professionals was defined by the principles approved by the CASE Board of Trustees on March 12, 2020:

Educational fundraising professionals work on behalf of those served by their institutions during this exchange of values and represent their universities, colleges and schools to donors, volunteers, and the larger public. In doing so, they also represent the integrity of the institution and of the fundraising profession. They must, in discharging responsibilities, observe and promote the highest standards of personal and professional conduct and continually strive to increase their knowledge of the profession. (“Principles of Practice for Fundraising Professionals at Educational Institutions”, para. 2)

Therefore, institutional advancement functions to liaise between internal and external constituents and stakeholders in order to grow (advance) higher education and its related interests. In addition, the CASE Board of Trustees outlined five principles that are to be followed by fundraising professionals who work in educational institutions, including: (1) personal integrity, (2) confidentiality, (3) public trust, (4) disclosure, and (5) compensation (2020). Most significantly, it is clear that institutional advancement and development as a profession cannot be ignored in the current higher education climate because of its much-needed revenue-generating function, and so, “fund raising will remain an important strategy for public institutions as they face the realities of today’s political and fiscal environment” (Weerts, 2007, p. 83).

### ***Structure of the Institutional Advancement Department***

The modern institutional advancement department in higher education consists of several different areas that each serve unique functions, responsibilities, and roles. There are three main areas that comprise the university advancement field: (1) development, (2) alumni relations, and (3) communications (Kozobarich, 2000, p. 25). In particular, these three areas encompass many functions, including those related to development and major gifts, annual giving and student philanthropy, alumni engagement and relations, planned and estate giving, corporate and foundation relations, accounting and gift processing, prospect and donor research, as well as marketing and communications for the institution. The vice president or vice chancellor title is

typically the head of the institutional advancement unit and frontline fundraisers (MGOs) are tasked with raising major gifts for the institution (Kozobarich, 2000). MGOs are either embedded within departments throughout the university or centralized on campus to focus on institutional and presidential priorities (Kozobarich, 2000, p. 27). The institutional advancement unit also includes central development staff who specialize in research, planned giving, corporate and foundation giving, donor stewardship, and annual giving (Kozobarich, 2000, p. 27). In addition, major gift officers are supported by operations staff, research staff, and gift processing staff in the institutional advancement department who record and manage gifts and ensure proper gift accounting and gift spending and utilization as well as conduct prospect background research (Kozobarich, 2000, p. 28).

### ***Roles and Tasks of the Development Professional***

The roles and tasks of the development professional in higher education are varied, complex, and ever-changing (Counts & Jones, 2019; Herrero & Kraemer, 2019). Herrero and Kraemer (2019) as well as Dale (2017) described the primary role of the development professional as that of “facilitator” to connect internal colleagues and relationships with external donors and supporters to raise funds for the institution’s priorities. Herrero and Kraemer (2019) also indicated that a constant and time-consuming task of the development professional is often spending time with internal stakeholders and leaders to legitimize their own role and their work in carrying out the mission of the institution, as well as finding themselves in the role of changing others’ attitudes about fundraising and development in their institution. Strickland (2007) went further regarding the larger role of the major gift officer (MGO) in today’s philanthropic landscape and stated that the position of MGOs is to aid in the adaptation of higher educational institutions to a new philanthropic culture whereby today’s donors want and expect

detailed interaction and high levels of engagement through their giving process (p. 114). She wrote (2007) that MGOs:

play a critical role in the transformational process [of philanthropy] by helping higher education institutions adapt to a new culture, by recognizing the challenges for accountability and public perception, and by facilitating change through positions of advocacy within institutions and through a commitment to values-driven work in their own lives and the organizations they support. (p. 114)

Herrero and Kraemer (2019) conducted a qualitative study and interviewed 31 fundraising professionals in the United Kingdom with a focus on understanding the work practices of fundraisers and how they learn more about their profession through their work in different organizational environments (such as the arts and higher education sectors). These researchers found that a key task of fundraisers is managing their internal and external organizational environments and “overcoming and negotiating obstacles not only in the face of specific challenges, but also as an intrinsic part of the work of fundraising” (Herrero & Kraemer, 2019, p. 9.). Similarly, Counts and Jones (2019) found that fundraisers work in both internal and external organizational environments that are highly complex and require them to manage organizational relationships and external conversations with donors that influences how people give and think about the organization. Caboni (2010) described this dual role for fundraisers within colleges and universities as that of a “boundary spanner,” whereby the MGO is both concerned with and responsible for the institutional/internal clients as well as the donors to the institution (p. 341). Overall, Dale (2017) described the complex roles and tasks of the development professional as framed through a moral calling, with philanthropy as a relational endeavor needing skills of facilitation, education, and organizational ownership, organizational skills to manage, lead, and take care of donors and stakeholders, as well as an ethical skillset that requires responsibility and stewardship (p. 405). Shaker and Nathan (2018) echoed the importance of relationship-building

and management as a key skill and role for professional fundraisers through their investigation of fundraisers and their profession. Also, Shaker and Nathan (2018) wrote that the fundraising profession must continue to grow in its legitimacy and knowledge base to be able to successfully recruit future fundraisers who have the needed interpersonal and ethical skills for the career in institutional advancement. According to Strickland (2007), MGOs have a unique stabilizing role within the institutional advancement department and the college or university as a whole, too, because as university leadership changes and morphs, MGOs are responsible for follow-through on donor-supported leadership ideas, even if the leaders have changed (p. 113).

### ***Assessment in the Institutional Advancement Department***

Within the institutional advancement workplace, development professionals and especially MGOs are carefully assessed and evaluated in a variety of ways. Caboni (2010) wrote that there are normative structures in place in university advancement departments that ensure that MGO behavior is prescribed and monitored (p. 358). Caboni's (2010) investigation found that there are three inviolable normative patterns in the university fundraising structure (exploitation of institutional resources, institutional disregard, and misappropriation of gifts), as well as six admonitory norms (commission-based compensation, dishonest solicitation, donor manipulation, exaggeration of professional experience, institutional mission abandonment, and unreasonable enforcement of pledges) that serve to regulate MGO behavior and practices (p. 358-359).

In addition to the normative structures that serve to socially and ethically-regulate MGO behavior, there are also practical systems and processes that are used to assess MGOs and their fundraising performance (Collins, 2013; Schiller, 2017). In some, MGOs are monitored and tracked on an annual basis through a variety of methods and performance metrics and

evaluations to assess their fundraising success (Collins, 2013). Fundraising success and dollars raised are the ultimate metric by which MGOs are assessed each year, and this creates an intense and “territorial” environment and culture within the institutional advancement workplace whereby MGOs focus on individually “owning the relationship” between donors and institutions, rather than viewing their role as that of “facilitator” of this relationship (Schiller, 2017). Carrie (2013) concurred and wrote that MGOs often conduct very successful solicitations together when working as a team and that this collaborative approach also helps to combat the possible internal MGO silos and “will make fundraisers far less likely to hoard or poach prospects” (p. 3-4). Schiller (2017) wrote that these MGO assessment metrics that track gift officer transactions (such as the annual amount of money solicited and the total annual number of donor visits) lead to an emphasis on the unsustainable promotion of individual success (“ownership”) rather than collaborative teamwork (“facilitation”) within the department.

Conversely, Carrie Collins, Vice President of Institutional Advancement at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia (2013) wrote that gift officer metrics, such as an ROI report, are an effective way to utilize data to analyze MGO performance and should be evaluated on a quarterly basis. Collins (2013) furthered that these specific metrics are the most relevant to predict an MGO’s fundraising success each year: number of personal visits, percentage of unique visits, proposals submitted, number of gifts closed, amount of gifts closed, assists/shared credit, and multiple of total compensation (p. 2). Therefore, the institutional advancement workplace culture can often be competitive, unfriendly, and self-centered as MGOs strive to achieve their fundraising goals through the cultivation and solicitation of an often-limited pool of top prospective donors and friends of their institutions (Schiller, 2017).

### ***Trends in the Development Profession***

Herrero and Kraemer (2019) investigated the roles and professional workplace of development professionals in the arts and higher education sectors in the United Kingdom and found that fundraisers continual work includes facing and overcoming organizational obstacles and “perceptions about the importance of having a ‘fundraising culture,’ rather than implementing change” (p. 10). Through their research, these scholars identified the importance of organizational culture for the development professional in the institutional advancement workplace and that the demands on the development professional from the organization could create a negative environment or a non-compassionate workplace (Herrero & Kraemer, 2019).

An unfortunate but common trend within the profession of fundraising is the significant rate of turnover and burnout within the profession, especially for major gift officers (Counts & Jones, 2019; Schiller, 2017). According to former Vice President for Alumni Relations and Development at the University of Chicago, Ronald J. Schiller (2017), “turnover can be costly” and “when a donor’s key contact leaves –whether it’s the president or development officer—the donor’s relationship with the institution is disrupted” and the result is “delayed or decreased giving (1).” Schiller (2017) wrote that an important way to counteract the negative impacts of MGO turnover in an institution is to include and coordinate with as many colleagues as is feasible in the practice of maintaining and cultivating donors and their relationship with the institution. There is, however, a constant demand for fundraisers as well as a plethora of well-paying, steady jobs in institutional advancement departments due to the increasing need for private funding and philanthropy to support colleges and universities (Counts & Jones, 2019).

Shaker and Nathan (2018) urged fundraising professionals to focus on what is most important in their work and to remember that



Fundraisers in higher education have an opportunity and perhaps a duty to draw on the context of their sector to define success not only by dollars raised but also by their ability to contribute to colleges and universities' public good missions in ethical, thoughtful, and inspired ways precisely because they are becoming a knowledge-based profession. (p. 15-16)

In this way, Shaker and Nathan (2018) illustrated the point that MGOs can draw upon the intrinsic value of their work as integral to the missions of the institutions for which they work, the professionalism of the field of development and its growth in scholarship and knowledge of best practices, and encourage the characterization of success within the field to not be primarily defined by fundraising dollars. As outlined in this section, the organizational culture of the institutional advancement workplace is rife with pressures and metrics for MGOs and, similar to the competing academic and business cultures located within institutions of higher education as a whole, can potentially lead to workplace environments with higher MGO voluntary turnover and that may not encourage or promote a culture of compassion organizing.

#### **D. Compassion Organizing**

Compassion organizing and its focus on organizational suffering and pain together with joy and fulfillment in the workplace is an appropriate theoretical framework with which to examine major gift officer turnover in institutional advancement settings (Frost, 1999). The body of literature for compassion organizing continues to grow as scholars conduct investigations in a variety of settings and through the utilization of robust methodologies and frameworks. This research often leads to “the tight coupling of the researcher to the context of pain, enabled by a deliberately compassionate and committed position” (Hansen & Trank, 2016, p. 371). Importantly, Dutton et. al.’s (2006) seminal work described the focus of compassion organizing not on the organizations in particular but on the *process* that occurs (or does not occur) in the organization in response to a particular pain trigger (p. 89-90).

Compassion organizing is derived from the word compassion, which scholars have found to be not an emotion but a social process with four components: noticing, feeling, acting, and sense-making (Boyatzis, Smith, & Beveridge, 2013; Dutton et al., 2006; Dutton, et al., 2014; Kanov, 2016; Lilius et al., 2011). Dutton et al.'s (2006) seminal work described this complex organizational process as a combination of the interaction between social architecture (context) and human action over time. Scholars have also distinguished between dyadic compassion and collective compassion (Dutton et al., 2006; Lilius et al., 2008; Margolis & Molinsky, 2008). Dyadic compassion occurs when one notices the pain of another and empathy is generated (Lilius et al., 2008; Margolis & Molinsky, 2008), whereas collective compassion exists where individual pain and suffering becomes the shared efforts of people coming together to decrease the felt suffering (Dutton et al., 2006). Compassion and its associated scholarship have roots in positive organizational scholarship (POS) and also important theoretical connections with a variety of additional disciplines and research, such as organizational behavior, management, and psychology. The literature of psychology, organizational behavior, and management have made significant advances in the theoretical underpinnings and depth of literature related to compassion research for individuals and within organizations. This scholarship is further enhanced through the relatively new field within organizational behavior research: positive organizational scholarship (POS), and it is in this literature where compassion scholarship is rooted.

### ***Towards a Definition of Compassion as Organizing***

Beyond the root word of compassion, compassion organizing has grown as a field itself within POS and includes frameworks and models that help explain its key components and traits (Dutton et al., 2006; Shepherd & Williams, 2014; Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2014; Simpson,

Farr-Wharton, & Reddy, 2020). Dutton et al. (2006) defined compassion organizing as “a collective response to a particular incident of human suffering that entails the coordination of individual compassion and acknowledges that the same structures and routines used for an organization’s normal work can be redirected to alleviate a member’s suffering” (p. 62). Dutton et al. (2006) outlined the model for compassion organizing and emphasized that organizations can respond to pain and suffering and create a culture of compassionate responses for its members (p. 89-90). These scholars (2006) wrote that organizations can create this culture of compassionate responses through the organization’s use of both social design as well as structural and symbolic features to enable patterns to develop over time which promote compassionate processes (p. 89-90). Shepherd and Williams (2014) furthered Dutton et al.’s (2006) definition of compassion organizing and wrote that compassion organizing is enacted through an organization’s recognition of pained members, an organization’s ability to feel the pain of its members, and an organization’s structural responses to these traumatic experiences to aid its members (p. 953). Researchers have also developed a model of organizational compassion in the healthcare context that combines the Organizational Compassion NEAR Sub-Processes of Noticing, Empathizing, Assessing, and Responding with the Ten Supportive Mechanisms in two sub-categories: social architecture (social networks, culture, roles, routines, leadership, and stories told), and compassion competencies (speed, scope, scale, and customization) (Simpson, Farr-Wharton, & Reddy, 2020).

Dutton and Workman (2011) reported that the lens of compassion is important in organizational studies for several reasons (p. 3). First, these scholars (2011) stated that the lens of compassion is important because it illuminates (often hidden) suffering and the related healing effect of human compassion, it also provides new avenues for observation of individuals’ and

groups' capabilities that are often lacking in this research, and, lastly, it provides an important focus on normal human interactions and their impact on institutions and their members as compassionate organizations (Dutton and Workman, p. 3). Dutton and Workman (2011) also noted that compassion organizing is generative because it continues to urge us forward to consider positive aspects of organizations and individuals and to further illuminate the power of organizations for healing in the midst of suffering and pain (p. 4).

Scholars have also concluded that organizational capacity for compassion is vital for a successful compassionate work environment (Madden, Duchon, Madden, & Plowman, 2012). Specifically, Madden, Duchon, Madden, and Plowman (2012) reported a new model of emergent organizational capacity for compassion utilizing a framework from complexity science where painful instances in organizations promote self-organizing actions by members within the organization (p. 689-690). Madden, Duchon, Madden, and Plowman (2012) found that “organizing for compassion occurs because individual agents—without the direction of their superiors—notice, feel, and respond to the suffering of others” (p. 699). In turn, organizing for compassion creates new norms and behaviors within organizations where individual members of the organization feel empowered to notice, feel, act, and make sense of their responses to the suffering of fellow organizational members (Madden, Duchon, Madden, & Plowman, 2012, p. 700). These scholars (2012) reported that this concept of organizational capacity for compassion will also lead to “expanded role behaviors that include caring for fellow organizational members, as well as [...] new structures and routines that hasten future responses” that help organizations focus more of their time and energy on responding compassionately (Madden, Duchon, Madden, & Plowman, p. 701). This research expands the scholarship of compassion organizing from an organization's *response* to a particular tragic/painful experience to an organization's overall

*capacity* and values to successfully weather painful individual and organizational events

(Madden, Duchon, Madden, & Plowman, 2012). Furthermore, Madden, Duchon, Madden, and Plowman (2012) found that

organizing for compassion occurs because individual agents—without the direction of their superiors—notice, feel, and respond to the suffering of others. These individual acts of noticing, feeling, and responding can result in the following actions: agents modify their roles and norms to include compassionate responding, agents interact and amplify role and norm modifications, and agents coordinate amplified compassionate responses. (p. 699)

### ***Historical Roots within Positive Organizational Scholarship***

The framework of compassion organizing has its roots and anchors in the positive organizational scholarship (POS) literature. Caza and Caza (2008) demonstrated that although there is a limited amount of organizational research that focuses on the positive parts of organizations (such as organizational citizenship behaviors and corporate social responsibility), POS adds to the traditional deficit-focused research on organizations because it exclusively focuses on the positive components of organizations (such as compassion). More specifically, Caza and Caza (2008) argued that the importance and unique quality of POS is that this research serves as a “challenge to predominately negative assumptions about organizational life” (p. 28). Caza and Caza (2008) described the importance of POS in balancing the organizational scholarship as a whole because

POS’s highlighting of the positive fosters the possibility of being able to see both the positive and the negative, thereby being able to view the whole. Challenging the traditional deficit model approach, POS promotes a dynamic picture of the whole organizational life, filled with the richness and tension of both positive and negative aspects. (p. 29)

Additionally, POS is situated under the umbrella of the positive psychology scholarship, and this term can “stimulate and organize research, application, and scholarship on strengths, virtues, excellence, thriving, flourishing, resilience, flow, and optimal functioning in general” as

well as its “focus on strengths, solutions, and what makes life worth living” (Donaldson & Ko, 2010, p. 2). Donaldson and Ko (2010) also demonstrated that while positive organizational behavior (POB) and positive organizational scholarship (POS) are both scientific studies under the umbrella of the positive psychology movement, they differ in important ways. For instance, POB and POS were developed in opposite methods, whereby POB developed from individual to group analysis and POS developed from organizational to individual analysis (Donaldson & Ko, 2010, p. 7-8). In addition, Donaldson and Ko (2010) wrote that POB and POS research studies and experiments are approached with different methodologies and POB studies are generally conducted utilizing survey research while POS research is typically investigated at the organizational level using a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methods (p. 7-8).

In addition, much of the research on compassion organizing in the workplace has been conducted by qualitative investigations, and Maitlis (2016) described the importance of qualitative research (such as in-depth narrative interviews, ethnographic immersion, close observation of organizational practices) for POS. Specifically, Maitlis (2016) observed the importance of qualitative research for POS for the following reasons: (1) its intimate nature between researcher and subject (and this special relationship’s importance for sensitive research topics), (2) deep examination of a phenomenon to discover rich, contextual analyses, (3) research in non-traditional settings to discover clear or new positive organizing settings, (4) ability to examine organizational processes during a lengthy time period.

Although a plethora of quantitative research exists that has examined various components of compassion in organizational behavior (e.g., Choi, Lee, No, & Kim, 2016; Moon, Hur, Ko, Kim, & Yoo, 2014), as well as significant mixed methods studies on compassion organizing (e.g., Abdoul-Ela, G. M. B. E., 2017; Lilius, Worline, Maitlis, Kanov, Dutton, & Frost, 2008;

Williams & Shepherd, 2018), this paper focuses on the qualitative methodological tradition that is well-suited for POS and compassion organizing (Maitlis, 2016). Specifically, Maitlis (2017) outlined the reasons for the use of qualitative research in POS: firstly, its intimate nature between researcher and subject; secondly, its deep examination of a phenomenon to discover rich, contextual analyses; thirdly, its research in non-traditional settings to discover clear or new positive organizing settings; and, lastly, its ability to examine organizational processes during a lengthy time period (p. 319).

### ***Qualitative Research Studies on Compassion in Organizations***

There have been numerous qualitative studies that have investigated compassion in a variety of organizations (see, e.g., Eldor, 2018; Heaphy, 2017; Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, & Maitlis, 2011; McClelland & Vogus, 2021; O'Donohoe & Turley, 2006; Simpson & Berti, 2019; Shepherd & Williams, 2014; Simpson, Clegg, Lopez, Cunha, Rego, & Pitsis, 2014). Several studies have investigated compassion organizing in healthcare workplaces where compassion is traditionally viewed as a prominent and core value of these organizations and employees (Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, & Maitlis, 2011; McClelland & Vogus, 2021). Specifically, McClelland and Vogus (2021) conducted a qualitative research study in two health care organizations in the same city of the southeastern United States to investigate how organizational practices enable and sustain compassion. The authors (2021) collected data about compassion within the healthcare organizations through semi structured interviews, nonparticipant observation, and archival data (p. 56). In sum, the authors (2021) interviewed 34 participants, most of whom were management-level employee (McClelland & Vogus, p. 56). Results of their study (2021) indicated that compassion practices in organizations that facilitate and support compassion perform one of these three roles:

(a) *infusing* compassion through attracting new members and resources to enact compassion; (b) *sustaining* compassion shown to patients, families, and colleagues; and finally (c) *replenishing* compassion and improving and restoring employee well-being and ability to provide high-quality compassionate care. (McClelland & Vogus, 2021, p. 57)

The researchers (2021) found that the “infusing” practices of behavioral interviewing and organizational fit screenings within the organizations’ hiring practices served as indicators to determine if applicants will show and support compassionate expression in the workplace (p. 57). They (2021) found that the “sustaining” practices of socialization and rewards such as mission and values monitoring, routinized perspective taking, recognition cards, and awards were effective ways that these organizations continued compassion-sustaining practices and processes (McClelland & Vogus, p. 57). The authors (2021) also found that the “replenishing” practices of sitting with the dying, personal support and counseling, support forums, and financial hardship resources were effective mechanisms to help employees continue to provide compassion at work (McClelland & Vogus, p. 57).

Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, and Maitlis (2011) led a qualitative inductive interview study of a billing unit for physician services within a community health system in the midwestern United States (p. 877). The focus of their (2011) research study was to examine everyday practices in the workplace and their possible links to the organization’s compassion capability (Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, and Maitlis, p. 876). This research (2011) extended the current literature on compassion at work because it focused on this workplace’s ability to have a reliable pattern of compassion and its associated practices, not simply an organization’s ability to enact one-time compassionate responses (Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, & Maitlis, p. 874). The researchers (2011) defined compassion capability as “the reliable capacity of members of a collective [organization] to notice, feel and respond to suffering” (Lilius, Worline,



Dutton, Kanov, & Maitlis, p. 874). As a result of their study, these researchers (2011) found that there were seven daily practices at this workplace that fostered two relational conditions: one condition is high-quality connections and the second condition is dynamic boundary-permeability norm which in turn nurtured the workplace members' ability to notice, feel, and respond to each other's suffering (Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, & Maitlis, p. 890-891). Specifically, Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, and Maitlis (2011) discovered the following seven daily organizational practices that served as important indicators of the organization's compassion capability:

(1) acknowledging: recognizing and honoring individuals' contributions to the unit in various ways, (2) addressing problems directly: dealing with conflicts, problems or errors immediately and in a straightforward manner, (3) bounded playing: engaging in fun diversionary activities, such as water gun breaks or practical jokes, along with an explicit awareness of need to keep the focus on work, (4) celebrating: recognizing important milestones in individuals' lives through sharing food, collective gifts, (5) collective decision-making: providing input and making decisions around a range of issues related to work and social aspects of the workplace, (6) help-offering: monitoring the potential needs of others and proactively making offers of help, and (7) orienting: socializing newcomers in the unit in ways that expose them to new tasks and people. (p. 883-884)

In addition, Heaphy (2017) used qualitative methods to investigate patient advocates (individuals who mediate between patients, families, and staff) in United States Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals and found that sensemaking, sensegiving, and emotion work all have important roles in mediating interactions (p. 643). Heaphy (2017) found that patient advocates mediated conflicts in the workplace through the sensegiving interactions of directing interactions and re-narrating interactions (p. 643). From her investigation, Heaphy (2017) also developed a theoretical model that showed the process and interconnection of sensemaking, sensegiving, emotion work, and emotion dynamics (p. 660).

Other qualitative studies utilized the case study approach to investigate compassion organizing in the workplace (Simpson & Berti, 2019; Simpson, Clegg, Lopez, Cunha, Rego, & Pitsis, 2014). Simpson and Berti (2019) studied organizational compassion through the lens of paradox theory via a case study analysis of Bhutan to both expand the literature to another cultural context and beyond its focus of compassion as a positive virtue (p. 4-5). The authors (2019) revealed that organizational compassion is complex, contradictory, and contains many persistent organizational paradoxes, including the tensions of sentimentality versus wisdom as well as domination power versus generative power (Simpson & Berti, p. 7). The authors (2019) found that “transcendent wise and courageous compassion” processes can be cultivated as part of an on-going daily opportunity for organizations and individuals to balance the tensions of organizational compassion (p. 29). In addition, Simpson, Clegg, Lopez, Cunha, Rego, and Pitsis (2014) conducted a case study of the Magdalene Laundries and wrote that compassion in organizations is a social construct and occurs through “categorization devices, interpretations, scripts, values, rules, and expectations of compassionate behavior” (p. 27). The researchers (2014) posited that compassion relations contain power roles and this is reinforced through “interactions between agents, society, categorical knowledge and other socio-material configurations” (Simpson et al., p. 30). Moreover, the authors (2014) reported that compassion should not be viewed as always positive in its consequences or motives, but that a complete conceptualization of compassionate organizing is one that includes negative, complex, and ambiguous outcomes (Simpson et al, p. 32-33). Researchers have also used qualitative studies to examine compassion organizing with respect to emotion management (O’Donohoe & Turley, 2006), within natural disasters and intense individual and community suffering (Shepherd & Williams, 2014), and, within the public service workplace (Eldor, 2018).

### ***Qualitative Research Studies on Compassion Organizing in Higher Education***

Although there is a plethora of qualitative research about compassion organizing in the healthcare and business workplaces, there are only a few qualitative studies that examine compassion organizing in the higher education context and with respect to the university workplace (Denney, 2020; Dutton et al., 2006; Frost et al., 2000; Waddington, 2016; Worline and Dutton, 2017). Three of these studies were published in peer-reviewed, referred journals (Denney, 2020; Dutton et al., 2006; Waddington, 2016) and two of these investigations were located within books (Frost et al., 2000; Worline & Dutton, 2017). Despite the varied geographical locations of the university workplaces that are studied within this small sample of qualitative research, each of these provide evidence for the link between organizational culture and the need for compassion organizing in institutions of higher education (Kanov, 2020). As Kanov (2020) discussed, there are two categories of suffering, inevitable and preventable, where inevitable suffering refers to the normal pain of the human experience (loss of loved ones, for example), and preventable suffering instead refers to conditions produced in organizational life that cause or worsen normal negative experiences within workplaces (p. 87). Kanov (2020) wrote that the preventable suffering in organizational culture truly “is not inevitable; it is a byproduct of contrived systems, processes, and conditions, and is thus preventable,” (p. 87) and the following research studies illuminate this real need for compassion organizing in higher education to prevent workplace suffering and improve the organizational culture and climate (Kanov, 2020, p. 87).

Dutton et al. (2006) conducted a qualitative study utilizing the method of an in-depth case analysis of a business school within a Big Ten public university in Midwestern America and how it responded to the traumatic event of three graduate students who lost everything in a house fire

(p. 62). The researchers (2006) conducted interviews very soon after the painful event (the house fire), observed and documented the case in real time, received access to electronic mail related to the case, and used an insider/outsider team design with trust between the researchers and the organizational members to conduct their research (Dutton et al., 2006, p. 63-64). The research team conducted open-ended interviews within three months of the house fire via a snowball sample with eight students, five staff members, and two faculty members who were all depicted as part of the organizational reaction to the painful event (Dutton et al., 2006, p. 63). Dutton et al. (2006) found and documented 20 significant touchstones and key events throughout their case study and then linked these touchstones to the theory of compassion organizing (p. 69-71). Ultimately, the researchers determined that there are four dimensions of compassion organizing that provided evidence for its existence:

(1) scale of the response: amount of resources generated and directed toward persons suffering; (2) scope of the response: variety of resources generated and directed toward persons suffering; (3) speed of the response: amount of time taken to initiate and complete the response to persons suffering; and (4) customization of the response: efficient patterning and shaping of resources to meet the particular needs of those who are suffering. (Dutton et al., 2006, p. 73)

The results of the study further shaped the model for compassion organizing and defined the “engine” of the framework as the compassion activation and mobilization and the emergent features (structural: created roles and improvised routines and symbolic: leaders’ actions and caring stories) as important to creating the patterns and processes that sustain the organizational responses to triggering events (Dutton et al., 2006, p. 80). In addition, the investigation of the business school within the university context provided five core mechanisms that helped explain the patterns of compassion organizing:

(1) attention to pain triggers is a necessary precondition for the compassion organizing process; (2) the generation and spread of emotions are central to compassion organizing; (3) members relied on a significant level of trust and

legitimacy at the business school in responding to pain; (4) organizational members drew on their particular knowledge, position, and relationship with persons in pain to improvise roles and routines that further shaped the organizing process; and, (5) through symbolic enrichment, leaders created symbolic acts and members generated stories that carried meaning and evoked emotion. (Dutton et al., 2006, p. 84-86)

Both Waddington (2016) and Denney (2020) published qualitative research studies on compassion organizing in United Kingdom higher education. Waddington (2016) examined the “compassion gap” within universities in the UK and wrote a critical reflection about the connection between compassionate organizational behaviors and practices and the compassion (or lack thereof) in the educational experiences of those employees. Waddington (2016) found a connection between the organizational environments of healthcare and higher educational institutions and reported that “there is an almost parallel process between healthcare practice and higher education in terms of failure to prioritise compassion” (p. 2). Waddington (2016) furthered that although there may be compassionate behaviors of individuals in higher education workplaces, the environment, culture, and structures of the universities themselves often do not enact compassion and actually can promote toxicity, turbulence, and negative morale among organizational members (p. 4-5). Waddington (2016) cited some of the possible causes for the lack of compassion organizing within university cultures to include an ongoing push for standards, results, and student well-being that are influenced by politics (p. 5). In her research, she encouraged the academy to utilize appreciative inquiry and narrative approaches as potential frameworks for closing the compassion gap in universities (Waddington, 2016, p. 6). Waddington shared three possible practical applications for increasing compassion in the organizational culture of higher educational institutions:

(1) challenge the ‘objectification and measurement’ of students and staff, which reduces people to faceless resources to be manipulated and managed, (2) ‘walk the line’ between challenging established norms and upholding them, by walking

in the company of colleagues and students who share the values and practice of appreciative inquiry, and, (3) be more attentive to the language and representations of compassion in everyday experience – to notice new stories. (p. 6)

Similarly, Denney (2020) conducted research in the UK within the context of universities grappling with the 2020 coronavirus pandemic and issued a call-to-action for compassionate academic leadership in higher education to prevent unnecessary organizational distress and suffering (p. 43). Denney utilized the unique situation of the coronavirus pandemic to shed light on the fact that preventable suffering (Kanov, 2020) has become rampant and even acceptable within the workplace culture in higher education (p. 44). Denney (2020) even reported that the organizational lack of compassion in higher education “is a vicious cycle where everyone in our universities feels pressured, overloaded and incapable of being compassionate to one another” (p. 45). She interviewed university leaders who were described by colleagues as compassionate and also found that there were limited examples of such leaders in the higher education cultural landscape (Denney, 2020, p. 42). Denney (2020) wrote that the business-like culture of the university workplace has exacerbated negative cultural trends in the academic sphere, such as a preeminent focus on efficiency, excellence, changes, and innovation through heavy workloads for faculty members and the flippant hiring and firing of temporary instructors (p. 43-44). Denney then contrasted the “pressure-pot” university workplace culture as an organizational whole with the compassionate sub-culture among peers and students in the university, especially as the coronavirus pandemic forced all organizational members to experience similar challenges, pain, and altered normal routines (p. 44).

Frost et al. (2000) and Worline and Dutton (2017) conducted qualitative research on compassion organizing in American higher education and published these findings in scholarly books. Frost et. al (2000) wrote a chapter in the book *Emotions in Organizations* (Fineman,

2000) that detailed stories of compassion in university settings and the findings (p. 40). In their research, Frost et. al (2000) found

(1) people often act compassionately in the face of pain without knowing what is appropriate or how compassion should be conveyed, and that (2) organizations create an emotional ecology where care and human connection are enabled or disabled. (p. 25-26)

Further, their research on narratives of compassion was guided by the following four assumptions:

(1) organizations are social systems and that people's interactions with others in the organization will comprise much of their experience of their work; (2) people are inherently emotional beings and experience connection and belonging through feeling; (3) people's feelings and actions are not completely determined by the organization; and, (4) the divisions of personal from professional are impossible. (Frost et al., 2000, p. 26-27)

Frost et al.'s (2000) research methodology consisted of conversational interviews with 22 people (faculty, staff, and students) from three different universities about their own experiences of pain and compassion in their workplace organizations (p. 42). According to Frost et al.

(2000), compassion narratives were important in the study of emotion at work because these narratives are "carriers of both the feelings of being in pain and the feelings of responding to pain as they play out during the conduct of people's work" (p. 28). These researchers also found that universities are places of organizing which create cultures, rules, and processes, structures around time and timing, and advance or demote leaders – all of which influences compassionate reactions by the organizational members (p. 35). "Clearly," stated Frost. et al. (2000), "universities as organizations establish an emotional ecology within which their members interact. That emotional ecology can facilitate or retard compassionate action" (p. 35). Frost et al. (2000) also provided some practical recommendations for universities on how to enable and foster compassion organizing, including creating the following policies and practices: (1) the

provision of space and permission for organizational members to experience their pain, and (2) the encouragement of university leaders to practice compassionate reactions to the suffering of organizational members to promote compassion as an institutional value (p. 36). This research (2000) also acknowledged the differences related to cultures, organizations, and industries as well as the influence of power and status on the compassionate actions of organizations (Frost et al., p. 39).

Lastly, Worline and Dutton (2017) wrote a book that examined compassion at work and the importance of noticing suffering at work for compassion to succeed (p. 37). They (2017) explained that suffering can derive from work itself, especially in the areas of downsizing, restructuring, change processes, heavy workloads, performance pressure, feeling devalued, disrespectful interactions, and more (p. 8). Worline and Dutton (2017) extended the traditional notion of compassion beyond the individual response and wrote that the structures, processes, and coordination functions in organizations are required to address compassion in organizations on a systemic level. Moreover, these scholars (2017) linked compassion organizing to organizational culture and described the phenomenon that

an organization's culture enables compassion competence through normalizing inquiry work and generous interpretations of suffering, drawing out empathetic concern and emotional expression, and making compassionate action seem like an expected part of the work environment. (p. 121)

Worline and Dutton (2017) also described two important ways that organizational culture was needed to understand compassion competence: (1) organizational cultures teach members basic assumptions about human nature and human relationships, and (2) an organization's values – stated and lived-out—and values that emphasize human worth and human interconnection [and therefore] enable compassion competence (p. 119).



### ***Connections to Organizational Behavior Scholarship***

Compassion research in organizational behavior literature has also been noteworthy (Kanov, 2020; Longmire & Harrison, 2018; Pavlovich & Kahnke, 2012; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzensniewski, 2010; Driver, 2007). Management and business scholarship has revealed that there tends to be an historical scholarly focus on research towards performance over societal-level human welfare (Walsh, Weber, & Margolis, 2003), an investigation of managerial responses to environmental stressors (such as threats and opportunities, e.g., Jackson & Dutton, 1998) or strategic and political categories, (e.g., Gioia & Thomas, 1996); a focus on research regarding compassion in healthcare environments (e.g., Simpson, Farr-Wharton, & Reddy, 2020; McClelland and Vogus, 2021), ethical leadership (e.g., Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012), and positive practices (Geue, 2018; Van Rensburg and Rothmann, 2020). Organizational behavior scholarship, on the other hand, creates important connections with compassion organizing scholarship in the research areas of suffering, empathy and emotions at work, meaning and sense-making within organizations, and workplace compassion.

### ***Suffering in Organizations***

Organizational behavior scholarship investigates the role of compassion in organizations and workplaces. For example, Driver (2007) explored suffering's role in spirituality and meaning-making in organizational environments and specifically investigated a gap in the literature to investigate finding meaning through inevitable suffering in organizations. Driver proposed that organizations need to be spaces where suffering can occur naturally and the resulting meaning-making can safely occur. In addition, Kanov (2020) called for an increase in suffering research and scholarship, and suggested a working definition of suffering as “the severe of protracted distress people experience when an instance of pain or injury (emotional, physical,

or otherwise) disrupts one's basic personhood" (p. 86). Kanov (2020) wrote that while suffering created and/or aggravated in organizations is a "part of the basic fabric of organizational life," it is also preventable (p. 87).

### ***Empathy and Emotions at Work***

Organizational behavior research also examined the role of compassion in organizations with studies on emotions and empathy in organizations. Research has indicated that organizations are relational and Brickson (2007) utilized the organizational identity orientation framework to identify its direct and indirect effects on organizational members, finding that "organizations shape employees' lived experiences—how people interact and understand reality" (p. 878) as well as promoting specific internal organizational social values. Further, Brickson (2007) argued that relational organizations are the most well-suited to directly and indirectly meet employees' needs for empathy and care through psychological contracts, formal organizational practices (such as mentorship), and promoting virtues such as caring, which leads to positive outcomes for the organization. For instance, Paakenen, Martela, Hakanen, Uusitalo, and Pessi (2020) investigated potential ways to increase compassion in organizations through interventions with managers, specifically through learning emotional skills. The researchers created an emotional skills cultivation training (ESCT) intervention and tested this new training on managers to see if an increase in emotional skills would increase their compassion. Longmire and Harrison (2018) conducted an investigation about perspective-taking and empathy at work and found that these two concepts were scientifically distinct and empathy yielded more support of actors through the target-centric mechanism, whereas perspective taking supports targets' minds through actor-centric means. Longmire and Harrison (2018) did find, however, that perspective taking was an asset (whereas empathy can be a negative) when the organizational

actor needs to decide individual interests or the interests of others, although this can also lead to resistance, selfishness, or taking advantage of others or the group. In sum, Longmire and Harrison (2018) concluded that “empathetic versus perspective-taking others results in more positive experiences overall” (p. 906). Pavlovich and Krahnke (2012) wrote that empathy comprises the first two parts required for compassion, noticing and feeling, and was thus integral for the more active compassion to occur. Pavlovich and Krahnke (2012) reported that “empathy enables people to suspend judgment and to comprehend paradigmatic differences to foster more enlightened relationships,” (p. 133) which builds positive and interconnected organizations and environments. Pavlovich and Krahnke (2012) asserted that the framework of the empathetic organization “challenges the view of organisations as being machines made up of parts” (p. 136) with the singular goal of profitable endeavors, and instead promotes a work organization that enables self-discovery, interpersonal and collective concern, and an increase in altruistic behavior.

### ***Meaning and Sense-Making***

Organizational behavior scholarship examines compassion organizing through the framework of meaning-making and sense-making. In particular, Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) wrote about categories of mechanisms that scholars have found work to be seen as meaningful or acquire meaning, including (1) authenticity, (2) self-efficacy, (3) self-esteem, (4) purpose, (5) belongingness, (6) transcendence, and (7) cultural and interpersonal sense-making. The authors reported that cultural and interpersonal sense-making relates to the making of meaning and is influenced by the social context of the work (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

## ***Workplace Compassion***

Organizational behavior literature also consists of research related to compassion organizing through the lens and scholarship of workplace compassion, or compassion at work. Dutton, Workman, and Hardin (2014) proposed a model of compassion at work that highlights the areas of personal, relational, and organizational within this interpersonal process and how the model can help alleviate suffering at work. They shared that “compassion is a fluid, dynamic process in which both the sufferer and the focal actor make sense of the situation and influence each other in ways that can hinder or facilitate compassion” (p. 281). Dutton, Workman, and Hardin (2014) also wrote that compassion occurs in organizations and that there are six components of an organization that influence both the process and outcomes of compassion:

(1) shared values: what organizational members view is important, (2) shared beliefs: what organizational members believe to be true, (3) norms: patterns of organizational behavior over time that shape the expression of suffering and one’s response with compassionate actions, (4) practices: repeated patterns of actions, and research shows that the following practices positively impact compassion at work: (a) practices that hire employees based upon their relational skills, (b) practices for employee assistance and support, (c) procedures that notify organizational members if someone is experiencing pain/suffering, and (d) practices that reward and recognize organizational members for helping each other; (5) structure and quality of relationships: network ties and high quality connections that enable expressions of and responses to suffering, and (6) leaders’ behaviors: symbolize and signal appropriate responses to suffering and acts of compassion. (p. 289- 293)

Kanov et al. (2017) expanded on the compassion model posited by Dutton et al. (2014) and advanced that the uncertainty experienced by both sufferers and focal actors within organizations was a major reason that compassion was difficult to achieve in organizations. These researchers (2017) asserted that organizations which created uncertainty also then compelled courageous behavior for organizational members who dared to be compassionate, and that this organizational

uncertainty for sufferers and focal actors needed to be addressed in order to then achieve compassionate organizations.

Dutton et al.'s (2006) work on compassion organizing has not been without critique and criticism. There have been critics of Dutton's (2006) framework and definition of compassion organizing and the assumption that organizational examples of compassion are accordingly beneficial and positive, including research from Simpson, Clegg, and Pitsis (2012). These researchers posit that compassion organizing is more nuanced and that power inequalities can cause legitimate and also illegitimate compassion interactions within the organizational workplace (Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2012). More research is needed to gain a fuller perspective and understanding of compassion organizing and to explore these possible illegitimate compassion interactions and the ways in which exchanges of power within the workplace context affect the roles and actions of organizational members with respect to human suffering in the workplace (Simpson, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2012).

## **E. Chapter Summary**

As the literature demonstrated, compassion organizing can improve both the culture, capacity, patterns, and practices of the workplace organization in response to suffering or painful institutional values and interactions that occur naturally in the work environment. Higher education as an institution has a mixed environment of different and competing workplace cultures of both the traditional academic culture and the more recent and highly-valued efficient and performance-based business culture, which makes it difficult to enact compassionate organizing (Denney, 2020; Waddington, 2016). Since organizational behavior and culture are positively impacted by compassion organizing, research is needed to examine compassion organizing within the higher education landscape and specifically the university advancement

office to determine the possible impact and effect(s) of such organizational behavior on development professionals (MGOs) and their decision to stay or leave their current college or university advancement department.

### **Chapter III. Methodology**

The purpose for conducting this study was to examine the effect of compassion organizing on voluntary employee turnover with major gift officers (MGOs) in higher education. The investigation researched MGOs in institutional advancement departments at multiple public four-year universities in the southwestern region of the United States in order to describe the possible perceived effects of compassion organizing within these work environments with respect to voluntary turnover. As a part of the research, the organizational culture of institutional advancement was also be examined to depict any additional themes regarding MGO workplace culture and satisfaction and how this may be related to the high rate of voluntary MGO turnover within institutional advancement departments. This chapter provides a discussion of the research design, sample, instrumentation, collection of data, data analysis, and concludes with a chapter summary.

#### **A. Research Design**

A qualitative approach was used to gather data to respond to the purpose for conducting the study. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative methods are useful for research and the qualitative study of individuals can be investigated successfully via a narrative or phenomenological design (p. 13). In addition, past research in positive organizational scholarship as well as compassion organizing has been successfully conducted with qualitative research designs (see, e.g., Frost, 1999; Worline & Dutton, 2017). The research design for the current investigation was a phenomenological research design because, as noted by Creswell (2018), the psychological and philosophical roots of this design are helpful for the researcher to examine the lived experiences of research participants as described by these very participants, usually via interviews (p. 13).

## **B. Sample**

The study utilized a purposive and convenient sampling approach, and, as appropriate, a snowball sampling approach allowed current study participants to recruit and/or recommend additional qualified participants to the study. For the snowball sampling, new study participants were selected if an alpha sample member (chosen based on qualities that meet the study parameters through the initial recruitment email sent to the MGO at each institution) identified new potential interviewees who may have also met the study criteria. The individuals who were selected for the study were chosen based on certain qualities that aligned with the goals of the research questions. Specifically, the type of institution selected for this study were public four-year higher education institutions within the Southwest District IV region as classified by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). The Southwest District IV CASE geographic region includes higher education institutions within the states of Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Texas (Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, 2020). This geographic sample was limited to the CASE Southwest District IV out of convenience and to increase the potential response rate of study participants. The data for the CASE Southwest District IV is publicly available and accessible through the online CASE Directory of Member Institutions.

The population of participants that were studied are MGOs who are current employees of an institutional advancement department within one of the CASE Southwest District IV public four-year higher institutions. The anticipated response rate or level of participation was high, as the number of four-year higher education institutional members of CASE Southwest District IV (N=86) was large and of those institutions, there were a substantial number of public four-year institutions (N=56) from which to determine possible study participants. Of the public, four-year



institutions, the number of MGOs within these institutions (N=281) was greater than the needed study participants for this investigation, 8-12 MGOs. This institution criteria and participant selection was identified for convenience and to encourage a good response rate of study participants. Each study participant was selected based upon their employment history and the individual must have been currently employed at a public 4-year institution as a major gifts/development officer and must have voluntarily left at least one other institution (located in the CASE Southwest District IV) in the role of major gifts/development officer within the past five (5) years. A sample size of at least eight (8) but no more than twelve (12) participants was interviewed in order to achieve data saturation. Each potential study participant was identified from the online CASE member directory by the researcher and then one (1) MGO from each public 4-year institution was selected from each institution's website and directly emailed by the researcher from her University of Arkansas email address with a recruitment message request for participation in the study (see Appendix B). Contact information (email addresses and phone numbers) for potential research participants was obtained from each institution's advancement website. The first eight (8) participants who met the study criteria and agreed to participate in the investigation were selected for interviews. Once selected, research participants signed an informed consent form to be interviewed and participated in a recorded interview on Zoom where the participant was asked the same six (6) open-ended questions with an approximate total interview time estimated to be no longer than thirty-five (35) minutes in total per participant.

### **C. Instrumentation**

The instrument for the study was constructed to have six (6) total open-ended questions to facilitate the individual semi-structured thirty-five (35) minute interviews with each research participant. The questions were developed by the researcher and are based upon the

aforementioned study's overarching three research questions as well as the literature reviewed for Chapter 2. The instrument was tested at least twice and the researcher made appropriate wording changes and updates for clarity as appropriate. The instrument was created as an interview protocol and was submitted to the Institutional Review Board for approval prior to utilization with any research participants. Participants were informed prior to and during the selection and interview process that their participation in this study is voluntary and they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The six interview questions were constructed and the interview protocol is included as Appendix A.

The instrument was pilot tested for the study with two MGOs who currently work in a public university in the CASE District IV Southwest region of the United States. Both of these MGOs fit the criteria for the study and have voluntarily left one MGO position at an institutional advancement department in an institution located within District IV for another MGO position at a different development department in another college/university within the past five years. Each pilot test participant was interviewed using the interview protocol and via a Zoom video conversational open-ended, voluntary interview format. The pilot test participants' interviews lasted 20 minutes and 33 minutes, respectively.

#### **D. Collection of Data**

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews with each study participant (8 to 12 participants total) via web-based interaction using the Zoom video meeting platform. Each Zoom interview was recorded to enable the researcher to review the interview at another time and to aid with transcription processes. Data gathering was conducted over a four-week period, beginning June 1, 2021 and concluded June 30, 2021. The researcher extracted all public four-year institutions from the CASE District IV directory and then identified the MGOs

from those institutions by a careful examination of the institutional advancement websites from the selected institutions. After this, an initial email was sent to all prospective study participants utilizing contact information available on each institution's advancement website (see Appendix B). The researcher selected one MGO from each qualified institution and sent each of these MGOs an individual recruitment email from her University of Arkansas email address. The researcher then conducted a follow up telephone call to the first eight (8) interested and qualified participants to confirm their interest and to schedule a time for the virtual Zoom interview. Qualitative interviews were conducted via Zoom video meeting at a convenient time for each participant and the interview protocol was emailed to each participant at least three (3) calendar days prior to the interview to enable each participant ample time for reflection on the questions and preparation for thoughtful responses during the interview with the researcher. In-depth interviews were conducted via an open-ended question format. A code number was assigned to each participant to guarantee anonymity to the participants throughout the data evaluation and analysis stages of research. Each interview lasted approximately thirty-five (35) minutes and was recorded via the Zoom video platform and then subsequently transcribed utilizing the closed captions setting on the Zoom application. A copy of the Zoom recording was given to each study participant to allow each participant the opportunity to listen and make any amends or clarifications to any questions or answers that occurred during the initial interview.

During each Zoom interview, the researcher took field notes to write down ideas that were not captured fully or completely throughout the interview itself. The researcher had a physical copy of the interview protocol to guide her questions of the study participant during the recorded Zoom interview. The researcher took notes on this physical paper of ideas and thoughts

as well as nonverbal cues that were not captured in the verbal expression of the participant during the interview.

After each recorded Zoom interview, the researcher took fifteen (15) minutes to journal immediately after each interview to record assumptions, initial reactions, and notes regarding the interview. The researcher used this time to write down her impressions of each interviewee. The researcher also used this journaling time to note any questions, assumptions, themes, or other considerations that may have occurred during the interview or immediately after the interview.

## **E. Data Analysis**

The data analysis included an examination of the open-ended interview protocol questions that were coded and analyzed for recurring themes. The interview questions were designed to answer research questions one through three.

### Research question 1

How did major gift officers who have voluntarily left their roles describe the relationship between compassion at work and their decision to leave a university advancement department? Interview questions one, two, three, and six will be analyzed to answer this research question.

### Research question 2

What were the specific organizational processes and behaviors that could foster a compassionate organizing environment for major gift officers in institutional advancement? Interview questions two, three, four, and six will be examined to answer this research question.

### Research Question 3

What, if any, were the possible impacts of voluntary turnover (or lack of turnover) for major gift officers on the overall organizational culture of the university advancement

workplace? Interview questions three, four, five, and six will be examined to answer this research question.

The data analysis process was a four (4) step-process, as outlined below:

1. The researcher read each study participant's transcript (closed captions on recorded Zoom interviews). During this reading, the researcher used the constant comparison method to look for repetition of words, themes, and ideas. The researcher wrote all themes and notes during this step of the data analysis process.
2. The researcher used the themes deciphered from step 1 to align those themes with the field notes that the researcher wrote during the participants' interviews. The researcher aligned these themes and notes and search for any similarities and differences and noted what those instances are.
3. The researcher used the themes discovered from step 1 and aligned those themes with the journaling notes that the researcher wrote immediately after each participant's interview. The researcher coordinated these themes with the journal notes and noted any additional context to what was stated by the study participants.
4. The researcher extracted one (1) study participant's interview from the research study and shared this interview with a professional institutional advancement colleague. The researcher asked this colleague to listen to the interview, read the closed captions/transcript from the recorded Zoom interview just as the researcher did, and to note and themes possible in this interview. This step of the data analysis process was used to verify the themes that the researcher found.

## **F. Chapter Summary**

This chapter detailed the research methodology and design that will be used in this investigation. The sample, instrumentation, collection of data, and analysis of data were also explained in detail in this chapter. In addition, the analysis of data included a description of how each of the three research questions for this study will be answered and investigated through this research design and procedures with study participants. This study was designed as a guide to understanding the current organizational processes and cultural conditions that can create and fuel a compassionate work environment for MGOs in institutional advancement departments in colleges and universities. It is the researcher's hope that the study will further the research of compassion organizing within higher education in general and within the institutional advancement department in particular so as to decrease the high voluntary turnover rate of MGOs in university advancement and promote positive workplace cultures and work environments where MGOs can thrive.

## **Chapter IV. Findings**

The current study was designed to explore the effect of compassion organizing on voluntary employee turnover and workplace satisfaction with major gift officers (MGOs) working in higher education institutional advancement departments. The rationale for the study was rooted in the empirically-based organizational behavior theory of compassion organizing and its examination of both organizational pain and suffering as well as organizational joy and satisfaction. The current study is relevant for the modern-day institutional advancement workplace and the overall higher education cultural and financial landscape as it examined organizational behavior with respect to the tremendously high rate of voluntary turnover among MGOs in university advancement workplaces. The findings of the study, therefore, may be beneficial for both university advancement and other academic leaders, university advancement departments, and other academic departments and leadership on campus to better understand the intersection of compassion organizing, organizational culture, and retention of fundraising professionals and staff. The findings provide support for further research and consideration of the impact of compassion organizing behavior in institutional advancement departments and its effects on the rate of voluntary turnover by major gift officers in higher education institutions.

This chapter begins with a summary of the study, which provides an overview of the rationale and purpose of the study, significance of the study, design of the study, and the data collection methodology. The chapter continues with a description of the results of data collection and an analysis of the data, including the procedures that were used by the researcher to analyze the data. Data were organized and presented according to each research question.

## **A. Summary of the Study**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the effect of compassion organizing on voluntary employee turnover within MGOs in higher education. The study specifically focused on data collection from major gift officers in institutional advancement departments at four-year public universities in the southwestern region of the United States. The study also examined the organizational culture of institutional advancement to observe any additional themes regarding MGO workplace culture and satisfaction and the relationship between these themes and voluntary MGO turnover within these departments.

### **Significance of the Study**

Institutional advancement departments have several important incentives and opportunities to collect and analyze data and then make organizational decisions based upon the findings of the data to improve the retention of major gift officers in their departments and decrease the high rate of voluntary MGO turnover at their institutions. The voluntary turnover of major gift officers is a phenomenon that affects the core of institutional advancement's function and purpose. Institutional advancement's core function is the cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship of relationships with donors and the voluntary MGO turnover disrupts the donor relationship cycle and therefore the propensity for the donor to make a philanthropic gift to the institution. Institutional advancement leaders and team members have an opportunity to examine the organizational culture of their departments, with a specific focus on compassion organizing, to better understand the motivations for voluntary turnover by their MGOs as well as the organizational behaviors and processes that can be utilized to retain these team members and foster a compassionate workplace environment.



## **Design of the Study**

The study was comprised of three research questions designed to explore the effect of compassion organizing on MGO voluntary turnover in higher education institutional advancement departments, the organizational behaviors and processes in these workplace departments that may foster compassion organizing, and also to identify any possible impacts of MGO turnover on these workplaces. A qualitative approach and a phenomenological design were used to gather data for the study. The study used a purposive and convenient sampling method as well as a snowball sampling approach that allowed study participants to recruit additional study participants who meet the study criteria. The study participants were selected from publicly available data about MGOs at public four-year institutions within the southwest District IV region as classified by CASE. The participants who were selected were MGOs who were currently employed in an institutional advancement department at a public four-year institution and must have also voluntarily left at least one other institution within CASE District IV in the role of MGO within the past five years.

## **Data Collection**

The study's selection process led to a total of 8 study participants being included in the sample and data collection. Each participant was identified from the online CASE member directory and directly emailed by the researcher from her University of Arkansas email address with a recruitment message request for participation in the study (see Appendix B). The first eight (8) participants who met the study criteria and agreed to participate were selected for the study. These eight participants then signed an informed consent form to be interviewed and participated in a recorded video interview via the Zoom video meeting platform. Each study

participant was asked the same six open-ended questions during the interview process (see Appendix A). Each study participant interview took approximately thirty-five minutes.

## **B. Data Response and Analysis**

Data for the study were collected using a researcher-developed interview protocol that consisted of six semi-structured open-ended questions that guided the individual interviews with each research participant (see Appendix A). A total of eight MGOs were interviewed for the study using a recorded and transcribed interview on the Zoom video meeting platform. Each interview lasted no more than 35 minutes and then was subsequently transcribed using the closed captions setting on the Zoom application. Each study participant received a copy of his or her recorded and transcribed Zoom interview and had the opportunity to review and make any amends or clarifications to the interview as desired. During each recorded Zoom interview, the researcher wrote field notes on a physical copy of the interview protocol to record any ideas, thoughts, nonverbal cues, and/or impressions of each study participant during the interview process. After each interview, the researcher immediately spent 15 minutes journaling to record her assumptions, questions, themes, initial reactions, impressions, and notes about the interview and the interviewee. The data analysis process was a four (4) step-process and the researcher first read each study participant's transcript and used the constant comparison method to look for repetition of words, themes, and ideas. Next, the researcher used these themes to align with the themes from the field notes that the researcher wrote during the interviews and noted any similarities and differences. Third, the researcher used the themes noted from the first step of the data analysis process and aligned those themes with the journaling notes that the researcher wrote directly after each study interview. Last, the researcher used one interview from the study

and shared this with a professional institutional advancement colleague and asked this colleague to note any possible themes in order to verify the themes that the researcher found.

In general, the interviews were conducted in a very routinized and similar fashion with each study participant and in accordance with the interview protocol and within the specific time parameters and mechanism (Zoom video application). The group of study participants willingly engaged in the interview and data collection process and offered their opinions and thoughts in constructive and meaningful ways. As a whole, the group of study participants did not exhibit any outlying behavior or patterns with regard to the interview protocol, method, and data collection process. In addition, the researcher reached data saturation, that is, she noted repeated themes from her field notes and in what study participants said in the interviews. Due to this data saturation, the researcher determined that no additional interview participants were needed for the study.

Table 1 includes information about the study respondents and their career backgrounds in institutional advancement, such as the length of time at their current institution, the length of time as a major gifts officer at their current institution, the length of time as a major gifts officer at their previous institution, the total length of time as a major gifts officer, and the total length of time in the institutional advancement profession (in any role, not just the major gifts officer role). Table 1 also includes a description of the study respondents' current institution to display the size (small, medium, or large) of the institution, the type of institution (public or private, land-grant or non-land grant, research category), and the campus setting (urban, suburban, or rural). All institutions were located within the southwest region of the United States. As shown in Table 1, the total number of interview study respondents was eight (n=8). Table 1 also shows that the length of time for the participants at their current institutions as well as their previous

institutions ranged from six months to six years, with the average length of time at their current and previous institutions at 2.32 years, or 2 years and 3 months (27 months) total. Additionally, Table 1 illustrates that the study participants' time in the institutional advancement profession ranged from six years to 16 years with an average time in the IA profession at 11.88 years, and their time in the specific role of a major gifts officer ranges from four years to 13 years with an average time in the MGO role at 10 years.

Table 1 also provides a depiction of the study participants' current institution and shows that while each institution represented is a public, four-year higher education institution located within the CASE District IV southwest region of the United States, there were some differences within those institutions. For example, four of the study participants (Brian, Rachel, Roy, and Jennifer) were located within large institutions, that is, institutions with a student/faculty/staff population greater than 10,000. Of those large institutions, two MGOs work at institutions in an urban capital city (Rachel and Jennifer), one MGO worked at a land-grant institution on a small city campus (Brian), and one MGO worked on a suburban campus (Roy). In addition, three of the study participants (John, Erin, and Susan) worked at mid-size public four-year institutions in this region. Two of these three study participants (John and Susan) worked on an urban campus, whereas one participant (Erin) worked on a rural campus at a mid-size four-year public historically black land grant university. Last, one study participant (Josh) worked as an MGO at a small four-year regional public university on a suburban campus.

Table 1.

*Respondents' Length of Time in MGO Roles, Career, and Description of Current Institution*

Name*	Length of Time at Current Institution**	Length of Time as MGO at Current Institution**	Length of time as MGO at Previous Institution**	Total Length of Time as MGO**	Total Length of Time in IA Profession**	Description of Current Institution***
Brian	2	2	4	12	16	Large four-year public land-grant research university on a small city campus.
Rachel	7 months	7 months	4	6	6	Large four-year public research university in an urban capital city.
John	6	6	5.5	11	11	Mid-size four-year public university on an urban campus.
Roy	6 months	6 months	1.5	11	14	Large four-year public research university on a suburban campus.
Josh	2.5	2.5	8	11	12	Small four-year regional public university on a suburban campus.
Erin	2.5	2.5	5.5	12	16	Mid-size four-year public historically black land-grant university on a rural campus.
Susan	3	3	10	13	13	Mid-size four-year public university on an urban campus.
Jennifer	1.5	1.5	2.5	4	7	Large four-year public research university in an urban capital city.

*\*Names of study respondents are pseudonyms and are listed in no particular order.*

*\*\*Length of time is measured in years except if time is less than one year and then time is noted in months.*

*\*\*\*All institutions are located within states in the southwestern region of the United States.*

### **Research Question 1**

How did major gift officers who have voluntarily left their roles describe the relationship between compassion at work and their decision to leave a university advancement department?

Research question 1 focused on MGOs and their description of the relationship between compassion at work and their decision to leave their prior university advancement workplace for a new advancement department at another institution. Responses to interview questions one, two, three, and six were analyzed to answer this research question. The findings for the research question varied with each study participant but there were three common themes in their responses. The findings revealed the themes of the importance of and desire for a family work environment, the influence of departmental and university leadership, and the reality of extraordinary circumstances (global pandemic) in relation to one's work environment and compassion at work. Each of these themes were revealed by the study participants to be important factors in their decision to leave their university advancement departments and in their descriptions of the relationship between compassion at work and that decision to leave their department.

#### *Importance of a Family Work Environment*

The study participants described various reasons for their decision to voluntarily leave their previous place of employment and begin working at a new institutional advancement department at another institute during their interviews. Four of the study participants (Brian, Jennifer, John, and Josh) discussed the importance of and need for a family-like workplace environment as an MGO in an institutional advancement

department. Specifically, Brian, Jennifer, John, and Josh described the importance of a family style work environment as an MGO and how this was an important reason for leaving their former institution and/or accepting a position as an MGO at their new institution. For example, Brian explained that he had experienced a family-like work environment at a previous institution where “I felt like not just the department, [but also] the entire university was more of a family, not just family-oriented, but truly cared about each other” and this is what he sought in pursuing employment at a new institution (June 9, 2021). In addition, both Brian and John shared that they relied on word-of-mouth recommendations of colleagues and acquaintances when selecting their new institutions and workplaces (personal communication, June 9, 2021 and June 16, 2021). Brian said that it was important to him to hear positive recommendations from colleagues about his new workplace, such as, “you will love it there, and they are truly a family,” (June 9, 2021), and, similarly, John shared how important it was to him in his decision-making process that “they shared about the workplace environment and talked about the family environment they pride themselves on,” (June 16, 2021). Jennifer also shared that the biggest factors in her decision to leave her university advancement department and work at a new institutional advancement workplace were culture and people (June 9, 2021). Also, Jennifer recounted the incredible family environment of her workplace colleagues at her previous institution where she “had a great team within our college that I absolutely adored and, you know, it was going to take something equal or better for me to be comfortable with leaving” (June 9, 2021). Jennifer also specifically shared her experience during her interview process at her new institution and how the family work environment was palpable and attractive to her: “I immediately knew that I wanted to

work with these people – everybody was so kind and genuine and, you know, just excited about what was happening,” (June 9, 2021). Josh concurred in his response that he sought an institutional advancement workplace environment with a good culture and that he “had to feel really good about my senior staff, colleagues” at his new institution because his previous institution was so supportive and it was a “very successful environment” (June 16, 2021).

In addition to recommendations from colleagues and experiences during the interview processes for considering a voluntary move from one institution to another, one respondent shared an example of how he experienced the family workplace environment and compassion organizing in his new institutional advancement department after beginning to work there:

So I moved here in July of 2019 and in December of 2019 my son was diagnosed with leukemia. And [with] no family in the area or anything, [...] And, the first thing he [the chief technology officer, my mentor] did, was, he was sending me texts, [the] President was sending me texts, and [they] literally said you don’t worry about anything going on here, we’ve got your back, and, you know, take a week off and we’ll talk about it in a week and we’ll go from there. And it was truly: forget about this place; take care of yourself. About a week later, I came back to the office and the group upstairs found out that I’d come back into the office and they literally lined up around my door to come in and give me hugs and, you know, that right there says a lot. I don’t even have to explain it, it shows the love they have for their family, and so I think if even that [level of] compassion was shown, that would, I think, say a lot to major gift officers and show them that this is a great place to be, wherever this place may be. (Brian, personal communication, June 9, 2021)

The other four study participants did not directly mention a family work environment as a significant factor in their decision-making process for voluntarily leaving one institution for another institution, but the desire for a family-style environment was indirectly indicated in their responses. These additional study participants directly cited a variety of different reasons and influences for their decisions and change in institutional work environments. For example,



Susan shared that her decision to leave her former institution for her current one was motivated by a desire for workplace stability in the midst of a personal life change (June 14, 2021). In addition, Rachel explained that she felt “stagnant” and “under-appreciated” in her MGO role at her previous institution, and that this feeling was a significant factor in her decision-making process to seek an MGO position at her current institution (June 14, 2021). Last, Erin said that her decision to leave her prior institution stemmed from a desire to have larger scope of work at her new institution and that “it will be an opportunity to learn a different world, to take a deeper dive into a different area of fundraising” (June 15, 2021).

### *Influence of Leadership*

The second theme that was identified through the interviews with the study participants was the incredible influence of leadership in the decision-making process for an MGO to voluntarily leave one institution for a similar role at another institution. All eight of the study participants cited the influence of leadership at their institution and/or within their institutional advancement departments in relation to their description of compassion at work and their decision to voluntarily leave their institution for another workplace. Several of the MGOs (Jennifer, Rachel) mentioned the harmful influence of their direct supervisor/leader and those negative leadership styles in their decision to leave their previous institutional advancement department and in their view of the relationship with compassion in the workplace. Jennifer described her direct advancement leadership as “the biggest factor” in her decision to voluntarily leave her previous institutional advancement department and find employment at a new institution (personal communication, June 9, 2021). According to Jennifer, she felt that at her previous institution, “there really just wasn’t a lot of leadership happening by my manager at the time. I feel like I was just doing everything I could to get by and wasn’t doing enough to really

grow and make an impact” (June 9, 2021). Rachel also described her dissatisfaction with her development supervisor at her previous institution from a perspective of working in a “really systematic, professional, but also progressive and inclusive approach” at an institutional advancement department immediately prior to her past institution (June 14, 2021). Rachel continued to explain that she “realized that in my current setting with my current reporting structure that [systematic, professional, progressive, and inclusive approach] wasn’t going to happen. [My direct supervisor] just didn’t have the lens and I realized was not ever going to” (June 14, 2021). Interestingly, Rachel also stated that she saw the relationship between compassion at work and an MGO’s decision to voluntarily leave a university advancement department as not solely related to the presence or lack of presence of compassion at work, but instead:

I do see where there is a compassion element, but I think it’s largely dependent on who your immediate supervisor is or what institution you’re working at. And I would say for me, very dependent on my motivation for leaving my job was the institution itself and my direct supervisor. (June 14, 2021)

Another group of MGOs (Josh, John, Erin, Rachel, and Susan) described the influence of the hope and vision for positive leadership and supervision at their new institutions as an important factor for their decisions to begin working at a new institution and as a descriptor of compassion organizing in the advancement workplace. For Erin, Josh, and Susan, the opportunity to work directly underneath a supportive and dynamic leader (associate vice president, vice president, and/or president) at the new institution was an important factor in this decision-making process (personal communications, June 15, 2021, June 16, 2021, and June 14, 2021). Specifically, Josh shared that “supportive leadership” and feeling “really good about my senior staff [and] colleagues” was vital for his decision to move and change institutions (June 16, 2021). Erin mentioned both the specific university president and vice president and that “while

she was at the helm, the university was very appealing” as a workplace (June 15, 2021). Likewise, Susan shared that the primary reason for her job change was “definitely my direct report to the associate vice president” (June 14, 2021). For both Rachel and John, the overall workplace atmosphere with respect to the leadership style and culture of the department and institution was appealing and important in their decisions to leave their previous institutions (June 14, 2021 and June 15, 2021). John particularly remarked about his fondness for the “openness of supervisors and communication levels” and that that workplace environment was very important to him (June 15, 2021). Rachel remarked more generally that she was very impressed with and liked the female leadership at her new institution (June 14, 2021).

Additionally, two of the MGOs (Josh, and Roy) shared that they also serve in some sort of leadership capacity in their institutional advancement departments and they explained the way that leaders can influence workplace compassion as well as have an impact on MGO turnover in the department. Josh explained that he felt that compassion is missing in a lot of fundraising departments:

Instead, these workplaces get hyper focused on statistics and metrics which are vitally important to being successful. But an overemphasis on that goes away from like the human to human compassion, so I think that’s where you find [that] the best leaders in advancement are the ones that can strike that balance and understand that we need to have goals but we also have to be good humans to our fellow humans. (June 16, 2021)

Roy also shared that good leaders in university advancement can support their employees and be compassionate by showing empathy and sympathy (personal communication, June 17, 2021).

Roy shared that he has found specific ways to support his MGOs in a compassionate manner, and those are through the following responses and processes:

Whether you know they close a gift and they’re excited, whether they don’t close the gift and they’re sad about it, whether they have lost a prospect to another internal prospect or to another development officer because that donor had

interest over there and they really enjoyed that person. You know those are things that happen that, I think, a manager can help their team cope with and then externally, you know, things happen, family members pass away, spouses or job, pipes bust [...] just being reasonably respectful of all that. (June 17, 2021)

### *Role of Extraordinary Circumstances*

The third theme that was identified as a part of the study was the role of extraordinary circumstances in the respondents' decision-making processes and views of the relationship between compassion at work and their decisions to leave one institution for another. The impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic specifically and its reality as an ongoing extraordinary circumstance in the lives and workplace organizations of the study participants was evident throughout each interview and all eight of the responses by the study participants. Jennifer especially illuminated the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic and how compassion organizing was not a factor in her decision to leave her previous institution because she said that

up until that point in my life, [I had] been very fortunate and very privileged to have not really experienced anything that I was seeking that compassion for in the workplace. This past year, though, I have, and going forward that will definitely be a factor for me [in choosing an institutional advancement workplace]. (June 9, 2021)

Jennifer also elaborated on specific workplace behaviors that her colleagues and leadership in her institutional advancement department exhibited when she experienced a traumatic event, the death of a family member, amidst the extraordinary circumstances of a global pandemic and how meaningful these organizational behaviors were for her during this painful time in her life:

I have had really great experiences this year with it [compassion organizing in the institutional advancement workplace]. You know, losing a family member is very tough, and, I mean, our Vice Chancellor was calling me, texting me, saying hi, how was I doing, making sure, especially, you know, with additional circumstances that it being a pandemic and me being away from family and not able to go home. [...] I felt with my coworkers and my team [that I] just had so much support here and that I didn't really expect to have that, because you know, I was new [in this department] and I didn't really know anybody, and they just

kind of stepped in and gave me that support here that I needed and it meant the world to me. (June 9, 2021)

In addition, Josh described the landscape of higher education institutions and how he has experienced compassion organizing during the past year-long pandemic in large part due to his self-described “compassionate Chancellor”:

Higher education institutions are floundering and budgets are severely impacted and the way that we’re funded needs to be rearranged. But there is a huge mental component to this for students, for faculty, for staff that almost has gone, you know, untouched, unless you have a very caring and compassionate leadership and you see a difference, you see it. And I saw a difference because I do have a compassionate Chancellor who cares about me as a person and wants me to be a good father and a good husband. (June 16, 2021)

In this way, Josh illuminated his belief that compassionate leadership is tied to compassion organizing in higher education and specifically for his role in institutional advancement. Josh also shared his shock and disbelief at the attitudes of other institutional advancement leaders with which he is a part of regular meetings and specifically with regard to their attitudes about MGO production and work environment during this extraordinary circumstance of a global pandemic (June 16, 2021). Specifically, Josh shared about his experience in advancement leadership forums during the past year and said:

I was in on all those forums with people that were in my role saying well heck no we’re not slowing down [during the pandemic]. It [this attitude] kind of hurt my heart a little bit, but it kind of put everything into perspective for me that I do feel very fortunate to have a good leader who cares about me as a person and that you know that’s where we start from in this [organization and work]. We at some point have to show progress and success for the fundraising operation, and we have to get our marketing things going right, but, in the midst of a global pandemic, if you can’t show a human side than I questioned her ability as a holistic leader. (June 16, 2021)

Josh therefore highlighted both his experience of being in the minority of institutional advancement departments that include compassion and/or a holistic approach to the workplace environment and external factors (such as COVID-19) that might influence MGOs and their

workplace behavior, and his gratitude for and acknowledgement of a uniquely compassionate leader who demonstrates compassionate behavior in the workplace.

### **Research Question 1: Outlying Comments, Observations**

The research question examined the study participants' responses to the relationship between compassion at work and the decision of MGOs to leave one institution to work at an institutional advancement department at another institution. Outside of the 3 main themes identified in the interviews of the study participants, there also existed 2 outlying comments as well as 2 observations from study participants that were situated outside of the common themes of the interview responses. One of the first outlying comments resulted from the interview with study participant John, who stated that he believed that it is only people, and not organizations, who are compassionate (June 15, 2021). Beyond that statement, John also shared a unique idea that perhaps there is an external compassion organizing concept that is unique to the role and responsibilities of the major gift officer in institutional advancement. To explain, John said that "major gift officers that tend to be on the road more than in the office. And so, why does their compassion and need for that not come from alumni rather than coworkers and others at the university?" (June 15, 2021). John further elaborated that MGOs should instead focus on the relationship between external compassion organizing with gift officers and the donors and alumni they work with and how this plays a significant role with MGO voluntary turnover at institutions. John provided a specific example of how external constituents have influenced his career in institutional advancement to further his theory of the importance of external compassion organizing:

There are several alumni and donors from [name of city] world [where I started my career in institutional advancement]. They became as close to family [to me]. There are several sport events [where] I see them with their kids and know them

very intimately due to what we do [as major gift officers]. They became a very large part of my career. (June 15, 2021)

The second outlying comment from data used in answering this research question is a result of the interview with study participant Erin. Erin was the only study participant to state that while compassion organizing “had a little bit to do with” her decision to leave one institutional advancement workplace for another institution, a primary factor in her decision-making was an issue with equity in pay as a major gift officer (June 15, 2021). More specifically, Erin recounted an instance at her previous institution to illuminate this point:

In my previous institution, there was an instance where, well there were a couple of instances, where I was not paid at the same level that other employees were that were doing the same job as I was. And I had more experience, but because I was younger, I was paid less. I brought this to the attention of HR. So, going through these experiences, [it] didn’t make me feel as if I was valued, and in my mind, it was time for me to move to a different institution where I would feel more valued. And I thought that working at an HBCU you would be a welcome opportunity to not have to deal with specifically diversity and hopefully equity. (June 15, 2021)

In this narrative, Erin not only mentioned an issue related to unequal pay respective to her work experience, but she also shared a concern with diversity and equity in her role as a major gift officer at a public higher education institution. Erin also shared that she voluntarily left her previous institution to work at an historically black college and university (HBCU) to “not have to deal with” diversity and equity issues within the workplace (June 15, 2021).

Two outlying observations for the research question were also realized through the interviews with the study participants. The first observation was that at least half of the study participants ( $n=4$ ) stated that compassion in the workplace was not a direct factor in the MGO’s decision to voluntarily leave one institution for another. For example, John stated that he does not think that organizations themselves can exhibit compassion or be compassionate, but it is people who can be considerate (June 15, 2021). Additionally, Susan directly stated that

compassion organizing was not a factor in her decision to leave her prior institution and she, like John, also believed that compassion is not an organizational characteristic but is instead an individual trait (June 14, 2021). Susan shared that despite compassion organizing not being a factor in her decision to voluntarily change workplaces, she does think it is important and:

I think that compassion is from person to person [and not institution/organization]. I wish it was overall. And I think that if you have a good leader, compassion is definitely part of their structure. The pain and suffering of employees is real and it does affect the end product. (June 14, 2021)

Both Roy and Rachel had similar viewpoints on compassion organizing in the advancement workplace and Roy stated that he believed in a need for “mutual compassion” in the team environment to be successful, especially in terms of production, but that this was not a factor in his own decision-making process for leaving his previous institution (June 17, 2021). Rachel also acknowledged the presence of a “compassion element” in the voluntary turnover of MGOs in institutional advancement, but ultimately believed that this turnover is “largely dependent on who your immediate supervisor is or what institution you’re working at” (June 14, 2021).

The second outlying observation from data for the research question was that one study participant’s reflection that the organization of institutional advancement departments in higher education actually lends itself to create the high voluntary turnover of MGOs (Brian, personal communication, June 9, 2021). In fact, Brian observed that, “I think that as organizations, a lot of the time, we also tend to cut each other’s throat, you know, we tend to try to steal other development officers from other institutions (June 14, 2021). In this way, Brian made the interesting and unique observation that institutional advancement departments themselves as organizations may actually create environments whereby compassion organizing and low MGO turnover rates were difficult or perhaps impossible to achieve due to cultural and other



environmental factors (such as culturally-accepted talent stealing and acquisition) within our organizational departments.

### **Field Notes/Journal Data**

During the data collection process, the researcher took extensive field notes during each interview and then post-interview notes immediately following each interview. The journaling process resulted in a depiction of a variety of possible biases and potential honesty issues in the researcher. In addition, the field notes and journal data revealed several themes and reinforced the findings from the data.

The field notes and journal data revealed several possible biases and honesty issues. First, the researcher had tangential professional connections to most of the study participants as the field of institutional advancement within the CASE Region IV is a small network and she knew a colleague or a friend of a colleague in each of the institutions from which the participants' worked. For instance, in the post-interview notes taken by the researcher after the interview with Josh, she noted that "we have mutual connections and I had to carefully refrain from those conversations at the end of the interview to remove bias" (June 16, 2021). In addition, the researcher noted after her interview with Roy that "I had to work hard to remain unbiased and not [be] casual in this interview since we know each other" (June 17, 2021). The researcher's connection, however small and/or peripheral, to each study participant and/or their institution, may have resulted in researcher bias in the data collection process.

Second, the researcher noted a few honesty issues in her field and journal notes as a result of her interviews with the study participants and this indicated possible participant bias in the data collection process. Specifically, in her interviews with Roy (June 17, 2021), Erin (June 15, 2021), and Jennifer (June 9, 2021), the researcher noted hesitancy, reluctance, or another kind of

barrier in the study participants' responses and willingness to discuss deeper issues and ideas about their past and present workplace experiences. Most notably, the researcher felt a strong honesty issue in the interview with Erin and that the interview setting did not cultivate a safe space for Erin to share openly and honestly, perhaps as a result of unintentional yet palpable cultural, demographic, and racially-related undertones and barriers between interviewee and researcher (June 15, 2021).

The field notes and journal data also showcased the theme of the importance of leadership's compassion for MGOs and their decision to stay or leave their workplace, which reinforced the findings from the study. The field notes and journal data reinforced the theme of the importance of each study participant's view of his or her direct and/or departmental leadership in institutional advancement and how this leadership affected their views of compassion organizing in the development workplace. According to the field notes and journal data, the researcher noted two specific examples of bodily and physical reactions expressed in the study participants when speaking about compassionate leadership during the interviews; joy on Jennifer's face when she spoke about her mentor and her leadership team, as well as Brian's crossed arms that then uncrossed when speaking about his family work environment. In addition, the field notes and journal data illustrated the impact of a compassionate leader and team in the midst of adverse or painful circumstances for an MGO because the researcher noted personal feelings and "being moved" by the example and story that Brian shared about his leadership and team's response to his son's cancer diagnosis and the subsequent ways that he was supported by them (June 9, 2021).

## **Answer to Research Question 1**

Research question 1 examined the way that MGOs described the relationship between compassion at work and their decisions to leave their prior university advancement workplace for a new advancement department at another institution. Data from interview questions one, two, three, and six were analyzed to answer the research question. The findings for this question revealed the 3 unifying themes of the importance of and desire for a family work environment, the influence of departmental and university leadership, and the reality of extraordinary circumstances (global pandemic) in relation to one's work environment and compassion at work. Each of these themes were revealed by the study participants to be important factors in their decision to leave their university advancement departments and in their descriptions of the relationship between compassion at work and that decision to leave their department. In addition, 2 outlying comments and 2 outlying observations were also analyzed from the respondents' interviews to provide a fuller and more complete picture of the scope and breadth of the opinions and observations made by the study participants.

Therefore, to answer the question, MGOs described the relationship between compassion at work and their decision to voluntarily leave their institutional advancement department for another institution as a product of the leadership within their department and by their supervisor. Specifically, while some of the MGOs mentioned the appeal of a family-style work environment (Brian, Jennifer, John, and Josh), and all of the MGOs indicated the extraordinary circumstances of a global pandemic on their workplace satisfaction, the most pervasive and clear theme stated by the MGOs was the influence of leadership on their decision-making process. All of the study participants mentioned the impact of their advancement department's leadership on their personal attitudes, connections, and attachments to their development workplace and especially

their leader's/supervisor's personally compassionate behavior (or lack thereof) during painful or traumatic experiences as a compelling factor in the MGOs decision to stay at or leave their institution. The study revealed that MGOs were more comfortable and aware of compassion organizing as it related to the behavior and relationship with their immediate supervisor and/or departmental leadership instead of within their organization and development workplace as a whole.

### **Research Question 2**

What were the specific organizational processes and behaviors that could have fostered a compassionate organizing environment for major gift officers in institutional advancement?

Research question 2 focused on the organizational behavior, structure, and processes in the environment of the institutional advancement workplace as a whole, and possible behaviors and processes that MGOs described as lending themselves to a compassionate or potentially compassionate work culture and environment. Data from interview questions 2, 3, 4, and 6 were analyzed to answer this research question. As noted in the responses by the study participants, the data showed that the MGOs focused on people, specifically, their departmental and/or institutional leadership figures, as conduits of their advancement department's organizational processes and behaviors in their reflections upon these questions. Just as organizations are composed of people who create, embody, and define processes and behaviors, the data surrounding this research question showed that MGOs viewed their organization's processes and behaviors through the lens of their interactions, observations, and relationships with their leaders and supervisors.

## *Organizational Processes*

In their responses to interview questions, the study participants described both the non-compassionate organizational processes as well as the compassionate organizational processes that they have observed and experienced in their institutional advancement workplace environments as major gift officers. First, the non-compassionate processes in institutional advancement departments as described by MGOs are discussed. According to Jennifer, “some of our most basic processes [in IA] are due to this high turnover and that we need to be constantly prepared for a donor relationship to be transferred to a new professional” (June 9, 2021). In this way, Jennifer stated that the foundation for the organizational processes in the institutional advancement department are actually predicated on the fact and reality of the high rate of voluntary MGO turnover at institutions (June 9, 2021). With the foundation of organizational processes in institutional advancement departments described as one grounded on the fact of the high MGO voluntary turnover rate (Jennifer, June 9, 2021), the study respondents then described the non-compassionate processes they have experienced or observed in the development workplace and how these processes affected their attachment and loyalty to their institutions. Erin described the non-compassionate process in her former institutional advancement department of unequal pay and a lack of process to achieve pay equity according to work experience and seniority for MGOs in her workplace:

Although my salary [at previous institution] was increased [,] it still wasn’t at the level of the other two who were again doing the same job that I was doing. [B]ut my thing was, well, why did I have to talk about it [the pay inequity]? Why wasn’t it automatic[ally addressed]? You know, I’ve been here the longest and I’ve been doing the job; well, why, when I have to bring it to your [my leadership’s] attention in order for this to happen? (June 15, 2021).

Jennifer also described a non-compassionate organizational process in her former institutional advancement workplace as the lack of procedures for voicing concerns and receiving assistance

for her concerns (June 9, 2021). For instance, Jennifer explained the challenge at her previous work environment of “not having a space where I could go to voice my concerns where they would have been heard, and something would have been done” (June 9, 2021). Brian shared a non-compassionate process and his experience with “one or two individual leaders, I wouldn’t necessarily say it was a whole organization” were not following best practices and also encouraged him to not follow best practices in his role as an MGO at his former institution (June 9, 2021). Additionally, Josh shared a challenge with the implementation of compassionate organizational processes that he experienced working in an institutional advancement department at a larger institution and then voluntarily leaving that institution for a smaller department:

It’s just frankly harder to do that [compassionate processes] at a bigger operation and in a field like advancement and then especially specifically for major gift officers. It’s very easy for me to sit here now, with my 25-person team to say: here’s the standards, either we meet them, or we don’t, and if one of my 25 people was having struggles I showed them grace, [and] that’s just me. It’s a super easy thing for me to do [with my smaller team and department] and I explained to the other 24 people who see this person is getting special treatment that this person needed grace. At bigger organizations that kind of translation to that level of personal—the personal interaction kind of gets lost because they’re so big. (June 16, 2021)

In this way, Josh explained his perspective that the size of the organization has direct implications on the leadership of the institutional advancement department and their ability to implement compassionate or non-compassionate organizational processes for their MGOs (June 16, 2021).

The study participants also shared their responses regarding compassionate processes in the institutional advancement departments and how organizations and their leaders have fostered these compassionate practices for major gift officers. The interviews revealed 2 organizational process areas that the study participants described as fostering compassion within the institutional advancement workplace. First, the organizational process of early career

development and growth practices was described as important for a compassionate work environment (Brian, June 9, 2021). Specifically, Brian shared that:

educating new major gift officers early on has been an effect of that and I think treating them with respect and allowing them to breathe in and do their own thing versus micromanaging and hovering over them. You know, people are going to make mistakes, let them make some mistakes and learn from it, instead of trying to hover over them and protect them before it ever happens, I think, giving them that space. You know, educating them early on, keep them thinking this is a pretty good place to work, I think I want to hang out. (June 9, 2021)

Brian also shared the importance of this early training process for new MGOs and emphasizing their career trajectory as a “marathon, not a sprint,” and that it is “not in their best interest to try to go after a year and a half” (June 9, 2021). In addition, Josh shared the importance of processes for MGOs that outline a clear career path for growth as ways to encourage a compassionate work environment and promote less voluntary turnover in the department (June 16, 2021). Josh explained this compassionate process on a personal level and shared that:

Higher ed is kind of rife with murky moves to different departments and varying levels of assistant and associate director, but advancement for me always had a more of a business-like atmosphere to it and so the pathway forward was very clear and understandable and digestible to me and so I chose to stick with it, one because I saw a way to kind of grow into roles, and I also just frankly liked the work. (June 16, 2021)

The second organizational process area described by the study participants as conducive to fostering a compassionate institutional advancement work environment was the establishment of clear organizational processes related to MGO’s roles and job duties. Susan specifically described the appeal and value that her new institution had for her due to its existing good organizational policies and practices, and how she had to create all of the processes at her previous institution (June 14, 2021). Likewise, John shared that his new institution was appealing because of the processes established for his MGO job duties that focused “more on frontline fundraising and not supervision of others” as well as “handling expectations and playing to the

strengths of the team” and how this helped foster compassion at the organization (June 15, 2021).

### *Organizational Behaviors*

The study participants also responded provided data that explained their perspectives regarding both the non-compassionate organizational behaviors and the compassionate organizational behaviors that they have felt and experienced in their institutional advancement departments as major gift officers. Just as the MGOs described their organization’s processes and practices in relation to their relationships and experiences with their institutional advancement leadership and supervisors, the MGOs also characterized their organization’s compassionate (or not) behaviors in relation to their experiences with their leaders. First, the non-compassionate organizational behaviors described by MGOs in the study interviews are discussed. One of the non-compassionate behaviors described by the study participants was that of apathy by their institutional advancement department’s leaders (Rachel, June 14, 2021).

Rachel elaborated on this apathetic behavior by her department’s leadership and said:

And I think it [my motivation for voluntarily leaving one institution for another] was a combination of maybe centralized lack of policies and procedures and then maybe just a lack of motivation for leadership to do anything. I think that the culture of like, this is just how it is, you should be grateful for the job that you have that provides you with this good salary and flexibility and don’t ask for anything more. (June 14, 2021)

In her statement, Rachel not only highlighted the intersection of non-compassionate processes and behaviors, but she also shared that her leadership’s apathetic behavior created an organizational culture of stagnation and lack of ability to improve or grow (June 14, 2021). An additional non-compassionate behavior described by the study participants was the organizational behavior of development leaders’ continual quest to recruit the top MGOs, even if



that means poaching these MGOs from other institutions (Brian, June 9, 2021). Brian elaborated on this negative organizational behavior by advancement leadership when he said:

We [institutional advancement organizations] try to steal development officers from other institutions. And we do it to ourselves, and so I think, maybe working on growing your own program of major gift officers and helping them understand that the organization they're starting to work at could be a lifelong career [might be part of the solution to the high MGO voluntary turnover issue]. (June 9, 2021)

Brian continued to state that this organizational leadership behavior of talent-stealing is unique for institutional advancement departments because these workplaces are collaborative in most every other area, and, "as universities and foundations we don't really compete against each other, so we share a lot of ideas. But we do compete for employees" (June 9, 2021).

The study participants also shared their opinions and viewpoints about the organizational behaviors of their leaders (and therefore their organizations and departments as an extension of that leadership) that could lead to and foster compassionate organizational behaviors. Josh explained the overall theme of compassionate behaviors in the institutional advancement workplace and stated that this work is "built on people and relationships and person to person interaction," and therefore that same behavior is what could foster compassion within the organization and with the MGOs as well (June 15, 2021). Roy also commented that leadership behaviors such as assessing MGO's work output at the end of the year are a sign of "the best managers" who support their MGO team (June 17, 2021). Susan further shared that an institutional president who supports CASE lends itself to a positive and compassionate organizational behavior for MGOs (June 14, 2021). Another area where several MGOs (Rachel and John) highlighted leadership behaviors that could foster compassion in the development workplace is in the area of communication (June 14, 2021 and June 15, 2021). Rachel gave an example of communication during extraordinary circumstances and how this impacted her view of the organizational behavior as an MGO:

I felt like my institution was doing a good job of laying out expectations, like keeping things moving forward but also saying, this is case-specific and [...] I think they showed compassion and humanity through that, like through the

communications across campus. So that part I liked, and oh, like [the organizational communications related to] the Black Lives Matter movements and race relations issues that we've had on campus in the last 18 months. I also felt like from a senior administrative [leadership] level, like, that our executives were, you know, trying to do a good job of listening and learning. And so that was good. (June 14, 2021)

John also stressed the importance of communication for the encouragement of compassionate organizational behavior in the way he described the day-to-day behaviors at his institution (June 15, 2021). John described the truly open communication he felt at his institutional advancement department level and all the way up to the university presidential level of the institution, and stated that "I had the ability to connect directly to them" and this was a deciding factor in his decision to join this new institution's team (June 15, 2021).

## **Research Question 2: Outlying Comments, Observations**

The research question asked the study participants to describe organizational processes and behaviors that might foster compassion in the institutional advancement workplace. Outside of the responses already shared, the data highlighted two additional outlying comments and observations in response to the interview questions. One study participant, Roy, was the only interviewee to discuss the importance of the organizational process related to the institutional advancement department in forming strong partnerships with academic colleagues (June 17, 2021). Roy stated that he thought one important process that would foster a compassionate work environment was to gain academic support and philanthropic buy-in, "so that when you work for a colleague, having a dean that supports philanthropy is key" (June 17, 2021). The second outlying comment identified in the responses by the study participants was the discussion of the non-compassionate processes or lack of processes with relation to diversity, equity, and inclusion for MGOs of color (Erin, June 15, 2021). Specifically, Erin shared her experience as an African-

American MGO and that of her colleagues who were also persons of color and the possible discriminatory processes they felt as minorities within the institutional advancement workplaces:

And there were quite a few, especially African-American, employees that were, you know, disgruntled or had had issues with the institution, and I was working for a state institution that was still a minority-serving institution, but particularly African-American colleagues had similar issues [with respect to pay equity and lack of formal processes to address inequity in the workplace]. (June 15, 2021)

### **Field Notes/Journal Data**

During the data collection process, the researcher took extensive field notes during each interview and then post-interview notes immediately following each interview. The journaling process resulted in consistent written observations with the previous research question. In addition, no other concerns or biases were identified from the interviewees.

### **Answer to Research Question 2**

Research question 2 examined the way that MGOs described the processes and behaviors of institutional advancement departments that might foster compassion organizing in the workplace. Responses to interview questions two, three, four, and six were analyzed to answer this research question. The findings for the question showed the lens with which the MGOs viewed this question and that is through an examination of their experiences and relationship with their development and institutional leaders. It is with this lens that MGOs then ascribed the processes and behaviors for their advancement departments and institutions as a whole. The MGOs described both the non-compassionate and compassionate organizational processes and organizational behaviors of their leadership and departments in response to this research question. In addition, 2 outlying comments and observations were also analyzed from the respondents' interviews to provide a fuller and more complete picture of the scope and breadth of the opinions and observations made by the study participants.

Therefore, to answer the question, MGOs described the processes that could foster compassion organizing in the institutional advancement workplace as those processes related to (1) early career development and path for MGOs, and (2) processes related to MGO's role and job duties. In addition, MGOs described the behaviors that could foster compassion organizing in the institutional advancement workplace as those related to (1) leadership behaviors that focus on relationships, assessing work output at the end of each year, and supportive of CASE principles and practices, as well as (2) positive communication behaviors at both the departmental and institutional level. The findings for this research question demonstrated that MGOs were more comfortable and aware of compassion organizing as it related to the processes and behavior observed and experienced with their immediate supervisor and/or departmental leadership instead of within their workplace as a whole, and then MGOs ascribed this individual behavior of their leadership teams to the organization as a whole.

### **Research Question 3**

What, if any, were the possible impacts of voluntary turnover (or lack of turnover) for major gift officers on the overall organizational culture of the university advancement workplace?

Research question 3 focused on the larger organizational culture of the advancement department within the public four-year university landscape and the impact(s) of voluntary turnover for MGOs on the larger organizational structure and environment. Data from interview questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 were analyzed to answer the research question. All but 1 of the 8 study participants (Roy) concurred that voluntary turnover for MGOs affects the overall organizational culture of the university advancement workplace in a negative manner, and they shared the specific impacts of this turnover on the culture of their departments. Specifically, the majority of

interviewees ( $n=7$ ) said that the voluntary MGO turnover in their institutional advancement workplaces had an impact on their organizational culture and this impact was negative in four main areas: (1) relationships with donors, (2) organizational resources for MGOs, (3) loss of institutional knowledge, and (4) MGO recruitment and retention practices.

First, the majority of the study participants ( $n=7$ ) stated that voluntary turnover of MGOs has a negative impact on the culture of the institutional advancement workplace. According to Brian, “culture can help keep the major gift officers in a certain place; I think the right culture, the right fit” and the turnover rate, therefore, “has a big effect on the workplace as a whole” (June 9, 2021). Similarly, Jennifer (June 9, 2021) said the voluntary turnover “absolutely” has an impact on the organizational culture of the department, and John said turnover “100% yes” has an impact on organizational culture (June 15, 2021). John further elaborated on the significance of high MGO voluntary turnover in the workplace and that this issue “is something that is alarming to all of us that have been in the profession for quite some time” (June 15, 2021). Erin agreed and said that MGO voluntary turnover “has a major impact when institutions have that revolving door” (June 15, 2021), and Rachel concurred, “it’s bad for morale overall; people can see how they can leave and go on and I think it can sometimes start a chain reaction” (June 14, 2021). Perhaps most poignantly, Susan observed, “Turnover should be a concern. The pain and suffering of employees is real and it does affect the end product” (June 14, 2021).

One area in which the study participants described the negative impact of voluntary MGO turnover on organizational culture in institutional advancement departments is the area of the relationships with donors. Brian shared the importance of relationship-building as the foundation of the MGO’s role in an institution, and, therefore, “if you’re somewhere for a year and a half and turn around and leave, you haven’t created the relationship to continue on for a

gift to the institution” (June 9, 2021). John concurred and said that this MGO turnover “takes a toll on the institution, [especially] the relationships of the alumni and donors to the institutions” (June 15, 2021). Also, Erin stated that “the business we’re in is about building relationships” and so the loss of a MGO through voluntary turnover results in the realization that the organization “lose[s] their connection to a person [donor]” (June 15, 2021).

A second area that study participants depicted the negative impact of voluntary MGO turnover in advancement workplace department’s organizational culture is the allocation of organizational resources for MGOs. The interviews revealed that organizational decisions about resources and training for MGOs has been negatively impacted by the voluntary MGO turnover trend and that often less resources and inefficient uses of training for MGOs are a result of this turnover (Rachel, June 14, 2021; Brian, June 9, 2021; Josh, June 16, 2021). Both Josh and Rachel discussed the financial decisions about resources that are impacted by the MGO voluntary turnover (June 14, 2021 and June 16, 2021). Rachel said that the “investment in onboarding” and the additional financial resources allocated to new MGO positions that continue to have voluntary turnover “is probably pretty detrimental on the financial side” of the organization (June 14, 2021). Josh echoed that sentiment and explained his organizational process in terms of resource allocation, which showcased his attempt to retain MGOs, at the expense of other development team positions that might have less turnover:

I think that what you see is that you put a lot more kind of capital into the leadership positions and so your senior directors and your directors, those are the ones that you pay more attention to, you pay more, you give them more resources because it’s the hardest one to turn over – the leadership of a development operation – and so you essentially kind of stair step down what your expectations are for how long that person’s going to be here, essentially. (June 16, 2021)

Additionally, Josh and Brian described the inefficient and cost-wasting organizational culture with respect to MGO training that is a byproduct of the MGO turnover rate in advancement workplaces (June 16, 2021, and June 9, 2021). For instance, Josh explained his decision-making process about how to spend training money and resources for MGOs where he feels he has to “qualify them [the MGOs] to say, like, okay, I’m going to get maybe two years out of this person” and then decide how much to spend on training that MGO (June 15, 2021). In a related note, Brian described the impact of the MGO voluntary turnover on the organization’s culture and how difficult it is for the department to continue to train new MGOs and then to have them turn over so quickly: “you’ve put so much time and energy and money into training these development officers and after a year and a half, they go off to another institution” (June 9, 2021).

A third area that the study participants spoke about as a negative impact on the MGO voluntary turnover rate in relation to the organizational culture of the department as a whole is the area of the loss of institutional knowledge. Both Jennifer and Erin described the negative effects of the MGO turnover on the institution and the organizational culture that creates a workplace where the remaining MGOs have to work hard to piece together information that is missing due to the lack of institutional knowledge in the department (June 9, 2021 and June 15, 2021). According to Jennifer, the organization has adapted in a negative manner to the MGO turnover with its culture of detail-orientation and distrust of information left behind by MGOs who have left the department for another institution:

You know it’s always said: ‘make sure you’re being very detailed so the person who comes after you has an easy time.’ And a lot of frustration can be felt is around things that somebody maybe in the past has done and not recorded, or you know not recorded truthfully. (June 9, 2021)

Erin echoes the organizational and MGO frustration expressed by Jennifer for the loss of institutional knowledge due to the MGO turnover in the department, and says that

even though they may have left information about how to continue [with the major gift work], it's not the same, [...] it wouldn't be a seamless effort for the new person and so you lose that institutional knowledge when every person leaves, and with someone leaving every year and a half, this is a lot of institutional knowledge [loss]. (June 15, 2021)

The fourth area that the interviewees described as a result of the MGO voluntary turnover and its impact on the organizational culture of the institutional advancement workplace is the area of MGO recruitment and retention practices. Josh, Jennifer, John, and Erin also spoke about this area in response to the research question and highlighted the negative impact that MGO voluntary turnover has had on the development workplace's culture of hiring and retaining talent and MGO positions for their teams. Josh explained his mentality in recruitment of new MGOs and how the reality of MGO turnover plays a role in his hiring of new MGOs:

Here I need to have some kind of tangential connection to this region to this institution to really put my full force into that person as a major gift officer, because I know if they are an assistant or associate director, the next time the opportunity comes along for them to make that next step, you're going to take it. (June 16, 2021).

Jennifer shared that while she believes that a lot of institutional advancement departments do a good job with recruitment and hiring of new MGOs, she said that "it's what's [...] after that is to make sure you live up to what you're recruiting to, and I think a lot of places fail on that" (June 9, 2021). In this way, Jennifer clarified that the organizational culture of advancement workplace is often focused on hiring and attracting talented MGOs but then falling short on retaining these same MGOs, perhaps due to cultural deficits in the organizations (June 9, 2021). The study participants also further discussed the negative impacts of MGO retention on the organizational culture as a result of voluntary MGO turnover. Erin shared how institutional



advancement has an organizational culture whereby career growth and promotion is achieved via voluntarily leaving one institution for another institution because “in order for me to move up to another level [in my organization], I’d have to switch and change jobs” (June 15, 2021). On a related note, Jennifer said that within the organizational culture, “I think there’s very much an attitude of everybody’s replaceable and, you know, that effort to retain [MGOs] is just not there” (June 9, 2021). Josh divulged that his organizational culture with respect to retention of MGOs is one of honesty and realistic with the facts that MGO turnover does and will continue to occur:

I have to have those very frank conversations with them to know that you are working as hard as you can for them and then to do that, but then to know that if you can’t get things done, there is no hard feelings about another college or another university across the country that can do that for them, and you support that same thing. And as the leader of the department or the division you basically start that process over and you just kind of hope to find that sweet spot. (June 15, 2021)

Lastly, John expressed his incredulity at the fact that the organizational culture within institutional advancement has been impacted so negatively in terms of retention of MGOs, and that “it’s hard for me to think that I’ve been in the profession for 11 years and part of me thinks about the number of development officers I’ve supervised and hired” (June 15, 2021).

### **Research Question 3: Outlying Comments, Observations**

The research question asked the study participants to describe any possible impacts on the culture of their institutional advancement’s department with respect to the voluntary turnover (or lack of turnover) of MGOs in their workplace. Separate from the responses already shared, the data highlighted 2 additional outlying comments and observations in response to the interview questions. One study participant, Rachel, was the only interviewee to discuss the impact of voluntary MGO turnover as it related to the institutional advancement department in forming strong partnerships with academic colleagues (June 14, 2021). In particular, Rachel

stated that she thinks that turnover impacts the faculty members with whom the MGOs partner with for development efforts because it “decreases their trust” in MGOs as partners in fundraising efforts (June 14, 2021). In addition, Rachel shared that the MGO turnover makes faculty “think that we come in and we’re just these flighty [development officers] and [we] can only be here for 18 months anyway so [they’re] not invested in working with me” (June 14, 2021).

A second outlier view that was highlighted in the data collection and analysis of the research question was the striking response by one study participant, Roy, who stated his belief that the high rate of MGO turnover in institutional advancement departments does not have any impact on the organizational culture of the department and workplace (June 17, 2021). Roy’s response to the research question was in stark contrast to the other 7 study participants’ responses about the significant and negative impacts of MGO turnover on the culture of their institutional advancement departments. Roy explained his viewpoint and what he believed needed to be changed:

It’s [high rate of MGO voluntary turnover] something that all institutions experience – that turnover rate. So I think that’s normal; I don’t think it’s disruptive [to institutional advancement departments’ culture]. I don’t know if I am really or not, but really shifting the paradigm and how we approach fundraising in that we are not the reason why people give; we’re the conduit to what people give to. And I think if we start incorporating that more and more into our conversations, then turnover shouldn’t be that big of a deal, because donors donated long before I arrived at this institution and they’re going to stay there long after I’m gone. So I think we just need to have a shift in paradigm across the industry. (June 17, 2021)

In this sense, Roy shared his belief that MGO turnover does not impact the organizational culture of advancement workplaces due to its frequency and unavoidability in the modern institutional advancement workplace (June 17, 2021). Roy furthered that institutional advancement departments need to therefore engage in what he personally works toward, and that is a

“paradigm shift” in organizational culture to focus more on the institution’s relationship with the donor, rather than the MGO’s relationship with the donor (June 17, 2021).

### **Field Notes/Journal Data**

During the data collection process, the researcher took extensive field notes during each interview and then post-interview notes immediately following each interview. The interviews did not reveal any other concerns or biases in the researcher. In addition, the journaling process resulted in consistent written observations with the previous research question.

### **Answer to Research Question 3**

Research question 3 examined the way that the study participants described the possible impacts of the voluntary turnover (or lack of turnover) by MGOs and its affects (if any) on the overall organizational culture of the institutional advancement department. Responses to interview questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 were analyzed to answer this research question. The data and findings for the question showed that 7 out of 8 study participants said that the impact of voluntary turnover of MGOs negatively affects the organizational culture of the institutional advancement department. In addition, 1 study participant served as an outlier in terms of both comments and observations for this question, denying the impact (negative or otherwise) of the MGOs voluntary turnover in relationship to the organizational culture of the development workplace.

Therefore, to answer the question, the majority of the study participants described the possible impacts of voluntary turnover for major gift officers on the overall organizational culture of the university advancement workplace as both significant and negative. In particular, the study participants described the negative impacts of the MGO voluntary turnover with respect to their institutional advancement departments’ organizational culture as evidenced in 4

key areas: (1) relationships with donors, (2) organizational resources for MGOs, (3) loss of institutional knowledge, and (4) MGO recruitment and retention practices. One of the study participants, however, was an outlier in the data and stated that the high voluntary rate of MGO turnover did not impact university advancement departments in a significant nor negative manner and instead posited that this MGO turnover is “normal” and experienced by all institutional advancement departments (Roy, June 17, 2021).

### **C. Chapter Summary**

The chapter presented the results and analysis of the researcher-developed interview protocol that consisted of 6 semi-structured open-ended questions that guided the individual interviews with each research of the participants (see Appendix A). A total of 8 MGOs were interviewed for the study using a recorded and transcribed interview on the Zoom video meeting platform, and each interview lasted no more than 35 minutes. Each study participant received a copy of his or her recorded and transcribed Zoom interview and had the opportunity to review and make any amends or clarifications to the interview as desired. During each recorded Zoom interview, the researcher wrote field notes on a physical copy of the interview protocol to record any ideas, thoughts, nonverbal cues, and/or impressions of each study participant during the interview process. After each interview, the researcher immediately spent 15 minutes journaling to record her assumptions, questions, themes, initial reactions, impressions, and notes about the interview and the interviewee. The data analysis included a 4-step process.

The chapter answered the 3 research questions for the study. The first research question examined how MGOs described the relationship between compassion at work and their decision to voluntarily leave their institutional advancement department for another institution. The study participants responded to this question and articulated their responses to highlight compassion at

work and their decision to voluntarily leave their department as a product of the leadership within their department and specifically by their supervisor. The second research question studied the processes and behaviors described by MGOs that could foster compassion organizing in the institutional advancement workplace. To answer this question, the interviewees described processes related to (1) early career development and path for MGOs, and (2) processes related to MGO's role and job duties. In addition, MGOs described the behaviors that could foster compassion organizing in the institutional advancement workplace as those related to (1) leadership behaviors that focus on relationships, assessing work output at the end of each year, and supportive of CASE principles and practices, as well as (2) positive communication behaviors at both the departmental and institutional level. The third research question asked study participants to describe any possible impacts of the voluntary MGO turnover on the organizational culture of entire the institutional advancement department. The majority of the interviewees described the negative impacts of the MGO voluntary turnover with respect to their institutional advancement departments' organizational culture as evidenced in 4 key areas: (1) relationships with donors, (2) organizational resources for MGOs, (3) loss of institutional knowledge, and (4) MGO recruitment and retention practices.

## **Chapter V. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The effect of compassion organizing on voluntary turnover and workplace satisfaction for major gift officers (MGOs) in institutional advancement departments in public 4-year higher education colleges and universities was the topic of this study. This study is important due to not only the alarmingly high rate of voluntary turnover for MGOs in higher education institutional advancement departments but also because of the lack of research on compassion organizing in institutional advancement. This study is also meaningful because of the opportunity for profound research and practitioner applications that can be applied to organizational behavior and culture in the workplace as a result of these findings. The current chapter includes a general summary of the study, including its purpose, design, and results. Conclusions as well as research and practitioner recommendations are also presented in the chapter. The discussion of the findings of the study and the chapter summary are then presented.

### **A. Summary of the Study**

The university advancement department is a unique organizational entity within higher education and an area where research about compassion organizing is lacking, especially with respect to major gift officers (MGOs) and their frequent decisions to voluntarily leave one institutional advancement department for another advancement workplace at a different college or university. The purpose for conducting the study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the effect (if any) of compassion organizing on voluntary employee turnover and workplace satisfaction with major gift officers working in higher education advancement departments. The qualitative and phenomenological design of the study utilized a purposive and convenient sampling approach as well as a snowball sampling approach. Data was collected through a researcher-designed interview protocol and semi-structured interviews with 8 MGOs. There

were 3 research questions that guided the study and are summarized below with data collected from the interviews.

#### Research question 1

How did major gift officers who have voluntarily left their roles describe the relationship between compassion at work and their decision to leave a university advancement department?

The study participants indicated various reasons for their decisions to voluntarily leave a university advancement department and pursue a similar position at another college or university, but all of the responses centered around 3 overarching themes: the importance of and desire for a family work environment, the influence of departmental and university leadership, and the reality of extraordinary circumstances. An important finding for the question was also that all 8 of the respondents credited the influence of their direct leader or supervisor as a factor in their decision whether or not to voluntarily leave their institution for another workplace and also in their depiction of their understanding of compassion in the workplace. Two outlying comments were identified in response to the question, as well, and one study participant stated the belief that it is people, not organizations, who are compassionate and another study participant described pay equity as a primary reason for her decision to voluntarily leave her workplace. In addition, two outlying observations resulted from the respondents' discussion of the question, which are that half of the participants focused on compassion as it related to their individual leaders and not their organizations as a whole and, secondly, one participant stated his belief that the culture and behavior of institutional advancement departments actually fosters the high MGO turnover and inability for compassion organizing to exist.

### Research question 2

What were the specific organizational processes and behaviors that could foster a compassionate organizing environment for major gift officers in institutional advancement?

Study participants focused on the specific individual processes and behaviors of their institutional advancement departmental leaders and supervisors, rather than their organizations as a whole, in their responses to the question about their workplace environments. Study participants indicated that the processes that could foster compassion organizing in their institutional advancement organizations included (1) early career development and path for MGOs as well as (2) processes related to MGO's roles and job duties. Study participants also shared the behaviors that could lend themselves to a compassionate organizing workplace as (1) leadership behaviors that are centered around relationships, performance reviews at the end of each fiscal year, and in those behaviors that are in tune with CASE best practices, as well as the organizational behaviors of (2) positive and open communication within the department and the institutional levels. Additionally, 2 outlying comments were indicated as responses to the question, whereby one participant stated the importance of forging strong partnerships with academic colleagues as a way to foster compassion organizing in the workplace, and another respondent described experiences of discrimination in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion for persons of color in the advancement workplace and how this hindered a compassionate organizing environment.



### Research question 3

What, if any, were the possible impacts of voluntary turnover (or lack of turnover) for major gift officers on the overall organizational culture of the university advancement workplace?

The majority of the study participants ( $n=7$ ) indicated the negative and significant impact that the voluntary MGO turnover has on the culture of the institutional advancement work environment and department. In particular, respondents stated that the impact of MGO's voluntary turnover on their department's culture is evident in the relationships with donors, the organizational resources for MGOs, the loss of institutional knowledge when MGOs leave, and the organization's MGO recruitment and retention practices. Two outlying observations to the question showed one respondent's view that the high rate of voluntary MGO turnover strongly affects the ability for MGOs to form meaningful relationships with academic colleges, and another participant shared the outlying view that due to the pervasive nature and reality of voluntary MGO turnover in institutional advancement departments, this trend of voluntary turnover affects all institutions and thus does not influence the organizational behavior or culture of the workplace.

### **B. Conclusions**

1. Major gift officers in institutional advancement departments in higher education settings are voluntarily leaving their positions for similar roles at other institutions for a variety of reasons. These reasons for voluntary MGO turnover can be understood within the overarching themes of the importance of and desire for a family work environment, the influence of departmental and university leadership, and the reality of extraordinary circumstances.

2. Major gift officers in institutional advancement departments described their understanding of compassion organizing in the university advancement workplace and how the presence of this phenomenon (or lack thereof) as a whole in direct relation to their experiences and relationships with their direct supervisors or departmental leadership within their advancement workplaces. Therefore, the experience of the MGO's relationship with leadership staff within the organization deeply informs the MGO's view of the compassion organizing of the department as a whole.

3. MGOs indicated that there are specific processes and behaviors that could foster compassion organizing in the institutional advancement workplace. The processes that could foster compassion organizing in their institutional advancement organizations include early career development and path for MGOs and processes related to MGO's roles and job duties. The behaviors that could lend themselves to a compassionate organizing workplace are leadership behaviors that are centered around relationships, performance reviews at the end of each fiscal year, leadership's alignment with CASE best practices, and open communication within and between the department and the institutional levels.

4. Major gift officers indicated that the high rate of MGO voluntary turnover in institutional advancement workplaces does have a negative and significant impact on the culture of the organization and the advancement department. MGOs said that the primary organizational areas that are affected by this voluntary turnover include MGO relationships with donors, organizational resources for MGOs (decreased funding for onboarding and training), a decrease and void in institutional knowledge as MGOs leave their workplaces, and the decreased quality and allocated resources related to MGO recruitment and retention practices.

5. Recruitment and retention of major gift officers was a challenge that the study participants highlighted as an area that has been negatively impacted as part of the organizational culture of institutional advancement departments. In particular, the recruitment culture of MGOs with respect to the expectations of newly hired MGOs is that new MGOs will not stay at the organization for a long period of time and the leadership perspective that each MGO is and will have to be replaceable. Retention efforts for MGOs in advancement departments are also lacking and organizations are not able to allocate or expend additional and/or necessary resources and efforts to keep the MGOs from voluntarily leaving their departments.

### **C. Recommendations**

#### **Research Recommendations.**

1. The study should be replicated to determine if there are different elements, behaviors, policies, and practices described by major gift officers in their views and experiences of compassion organizing and its relationship with voluntary MGO turnover in institutional advancement workplaces.

2. The study should be extended to determine if there are additional findings for MGOs who have voluntarily left higher education institutional advancement departments and are now employed as MGOs within nonprofits (not higher education institutions).

3. The study should be extended to determine if there are additional findings for MGOs who have recently transitioned from an MGO role at one institutional advancement department to another one (within the past 5 years) and compare this data with MGOs who have voluntarily left one institution for another institution many years ago (such as within the past 20 years). This study extension could lend itself to a deeper understanding of retention and why MGOs stay at institutions for longer than the average voluntary turnover length of time.

4. Other studies could examine more closely the relationship between compassion organizing and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and how these concepts are related and what, if any, is the relationship between voluntary MGO turnover, compassion organizing, and DEI.

5. Other studies could examine compassion organizing within other departments on the university campus in addition to the institutional advancement department in order to see any similarities or differences between the enactment of compassion organizing in a variety of higher educational workplace settings. The study could also lend itself to findings related to whether or not the profession and role of a MGO is unique to higher education and if the institutional advancement department is also a unique organization whereby compassion organizing is harder, easier, or similar to enact in comparison with other departments on campus.

6. Other studies could examine the idea of “external compassion” as stated by one of the study participants in this research study; that is, if the specific, unique, and outward-facing role of the MGO profession and role lends itself to a new definition of compassion organizing: external compassion organizing. These studies could investigate the relationship between MGOs and external stakeholders (alumni, donors, community members) to learn more about this potential new area of compassion organizing.

7. Other studies could examine compassion organizing within institutional advancement departments at different college and university types, such as community/two-year colleges, private institutions, as well as institutions located outside of the southwest CASE District IV to broaden the data sample.

8. Other studies could examine compassion organizing within other philanthropic organizations outside of higher education and its possible impact and/or affect on major gift officers and voluntary turnover within those organizations.

9. A future study should examine compassion organizing in higher education institutional advancement departments with a specific focus on leadership (university presidents, deans, vice chancellors, etcetera) and the influence of leadership with relation to the organizational culture of the institution and especially the organizational culture of the development workplace within the institution. A future study could also examine other development positions, such as planned giving officers, annual giving staff, and prospect research staff in addition to major gift officers and their experiences with compassion organizing and interactions between their leaders in the university advancement workplace.

#### **Practitioner Recommendations.**

1. Leaders in institutional advancement departments should review the information in this study and evaluate their current organizational structure with culture, processes, and behavior related to compassion organizing in mind.

2. Leaders in institutional advancement departments should review the information in this study and conduct internal conversations, interviews, and open communication forums with their MGOs to better understand their motivations to stay or leave their positions in institutional advancement. This will enable leaders to make better-informed decisions related to departmental policies and practices, allocation of resources for MGO recruitment and retention, and might be a way to improve or enhance a positive organizational culture in their departments that is able to recruit and retain talented MGOs successfully.

3. MGOs should review the information in the study in order to better understand their own motivations for voluntarily leaving one institutional advancement department for another department at a different institution and use the data to examine future workplaces and career decisions with an appreciation for the practices, policies, and leadership behaviors that could foster compassion organizing and therefore a positive workplace environment for the MGOs.

4. Institutional advancement departments should work with CASE, organizational behavior scholars, and other qualified experts to participate in regular trainings for both leadership as well as development department staff (including MGOs) to help each fundraising team member learn to be effective in their role, promote a positive and flourishing workplace environment, and help co-create a culture of positivity, growth, and learning for all.

#### **D. Discussion**

Voluntary turnover for major gift officers (MGOs) in higher education institutional advancement departments is regrettably a very common phenomenon as MGOs continue to choose to leave one institution for a similar MGO role at another institution (Counts & Jones, 2019; Schiller, 2017). Despite the tremendous growth of scholarly research on compassion organizing as coined by Frost (1999) over the past several decades, there is limited research on this model in the higher education organizational context, and no research to date within the institutional advancement department specifically (Denney, 2020; Dutton et al., 2006; Frost et al., 2000; Waddington, 2016; Worline and Dutton, 2017). The implications for and effects of this voluntary MGO turnover and workplace culture in specific relationship to the organizational behavior research on compassion organizing were examined in this investigation.

As this study has indicated, compassion organizing may play a role in the decision-making process of individual major gift officers (MGOs) in whether to stay or leave an

institutional advancement department for another institution and workplace. In addition, a theme furthered by this study is the notion that compassion organizing (and also the lack of compassion organizing) does impact the workplace culture, behaviors, practices, and policies found within the institutional advancement department.

This study revealed consistent findings with the current literature on compassion organizing in the fact that the data from participant interviews focused both on the individual leadership behavior of supervisors as experienced by the MGOs as well as the organizational behavior of the development department. For example, Dutton et. al (2006)'s research within a business school at a public university found that one of the important parts of the model of compassion organization included structural and symbolic features, and specifically the symbolic features of leaders' actions and caring stories as vital to the organizational processes that foster compassionate responses to painful events (p. 80). In addition, this present study concurred with Denney's (2020) research within the university workplace and its findings that university leaders have a significant role in being conductors of organizational compassion and ways that organizations practice compassionate responses (p. 42). Similarly, the findings that resulted from this study revealed that the study participants focused more on the individual behaviors and experiences between themselves and their development leadership and supervisors instead of the practices and behaviors of the organization (i.e., the advancement workplace) as a whole due to the importance of this supervisor-employee relationship and how this organizational unit is the lens by which MGOs view their organizational culture as a whole. Therefore, the present research does show that compassion organizing as experienced by MGOs in their workplaces is felt (or not felt) through their relationships with their departmental leadership. Moreover, this study demonstrated the real and perceived impact of compassion organizing (as viewed through

the lens of the MGOs' experiences with their supervisors) on the culture of the development workplace and the tremendous ways in which this compassion organizing can negatively impact an MGO and aid in his/her decision to leave one institution and voluntarily turn over to another institution after a relatively short tenure (18 months on average at one institution).

The findings of this study seem to support the notion that for higher education institutional advancement departments, compassion organizing does play a role in the voluntary turnover of major gift officers from one institution to another institution. The findings of this study also seem to indicate that compassion organizing (and its lack of presence) also impact the overall workplace culture in institutional advancement departments. However, the data collected from major gift officers as study participants indicated that the most important and influential source of their view of compassion organizing within the institutional advancement department was not their perception of the department and its organization and culture as a whole, but instead was their relationship and interactions with their development leadership and/or supervisors. This suggests that there are many other variables and theoretical frameworks beyond or in addition to compassion organizing on a structural and organizational level to consider when examining the voluntary turnover of major gift officers within institutional advancement departments. Further, specific research could be conducted with and about the leaders in institutional advancement departments to examine their leadership styles and behaviors in order to strengthen the research and data from this study about the influence of leadership on the development workplace's culture and compassion organizing as a whole.

The study could have been improved by an increased sample size ( $n=8$ ) and the ability to gather more interview data from additional MGOs. This study could have also been improved by collecting data from institutional advancement department leaders and comparing their



understandings, thoughts, and practices with regard to compassion organizing and the voluntary turnover of MGOs in their departments with that of the data collected from MGOs. In addition, this study could have been improved by interviewing other staff within the institutional advancement department who are not in the MGO role to further enhance the overall understanding of the organizational behavior and culture of the workplace as a whole.

#### **E. Chapter Summary**

The chapter included a summary of the study and answers to each of the 3 research questions. There were 5 conclusions made from the study that were shared, such as the conclusion that major gift officers in institutional advancement departments described their understanding of compassion organizing in the university advancement workplace and how the presence of this phenomenon (or lack thereof) as a whole in direct relation to their experiences and relationships with their direct supervisors or departmental leadership within their advancement workplaces. Additionally, recommendations for further research and practice were provided. The chapter was concluded with a discussion of the study.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Instrument

**Should I Stay or Should I Go? Compassion Organizing and  
The University Advancement Workplace  
University of Arkansas**

Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time at current institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time as a major gifts officer at current institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of time as a major gifts officer at previous institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Total length of time as a major gift officer: \_\_\_\_\_

Total length of time in the institutional advancement profession: \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY ABOUT YOUR DECISION TO VOLUNTARILY LEAVE ONE INSTITUTION TO WORK IN ANOTHER INSTITUTION IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT. THIS STUDY REALLY FOCUSES ON YOU AND THE REASONS WHY YOU CHOSE TO CHANGE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS.**

**I PROVIDED YOU WITH A CONSENT FORM FOR YOUR REVIEW, AND HAVE RECEIVED YOUR SIGNED COPY. DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT ANYTHING ON THAT FORM BEFORE WE GO ON? NO IDENTIFYING INFORMATION WILL BE USED IN ANY PUBLICATION OR REPORT RESULTING FROM THIS RESEARCH AND ALL INFORMATION COLLECTED WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL TO THE EXTENT ALLOWED BY LAW AND UNIVERSITY POLICY.**

**YOUR PARTICIPATION IS ENTIRELY VOLUNTARY AND YOU MAINTAIN THE RIGHT TO WITHDRAW AT ANY TIME.**

**BEFORE WE BEGIN, DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?**

## DO I HAVE YOUR PERMISSION TO BEGIN?

Should you have questions or concerns about this survey, please contact Christina M. Smith ([REDACTED]) or her Dissertation Director, Dr. Michael Miller ([REDACTED]), University of Arkansas, (479) 575-3582.

1. Describe for me your decision to work in development in higher education. What do you think ultimately led you to decide to pursue this profession?

*Other elements to consider:*

-mentors/influential colleagues

-workplace culture, environment

-Formal education bodies

-Informal associations

-Religious affiliations

-Friends/peers

2. When you think about your decision to voluntarily leave your last institution and its development department, what factors were important to you when you made this decision to leave?

*Other elements to consider:*

-workplace environment/culture

-influence of workplace leadership/supervisor(s)

-influence of work colleagues



-issues of pay equity, desire for promotion, lack of pathway to advance in career at former institution

-occurrence of a traumatic/significant event(s) (personally or within organization/workplace)

-organization's compassionate response in different situations (observed and/or personally experienced)

3. Once you decided to voluntarily leave your former institution and its development department, what did you look for in your new job/department? What did you seek as you pursued employment as looked for a job as a major gifts officer at a new institution?

*Other elements to consider:*

-workplace culture, climate

-institution's reputation (formally through press/media, rankings, etc., and informally through word of mouth, colleagues, professional associations, etc.)

-evidence of workplace compassion (how the organization responds to the inevitable pain, suffering, traumatic events of its organizational members; the processes in place to foster and create a culture of compassion organizing; leadership and/or colleagues who demonstrates compassionate organizing/behavior, etc.)

4. We can define compassion in the workplace as the organization's response to the pain and suffering of its employees and the way that an organization notices, feels, acts, and makes sense of painful events in the workplace. In your opinion, do you think compassion (as defined here) in the development workplace was a factor in your decision to leave your previous institution? Why or why not? Did the organization's response to an instance of pain (personally or with a colleague) affect your decision to leave?

*Other elements to consider:*

--personal instances/events of pain, suffering that may have occurred while working at your previous institution – and your organization's response

--known experiences/events of pain, suffering of your colleagues at your previous institution and their recollections of how your organization responded

5. As you may know, voluntary turnover for major gifts officers in institutional advancement departments across the U.S. is very high, with the average tenure for a major gifts officer at one institution a mere 1.5 years. Do you think this high turnover rate for MGOs within institutional advancement departments has any impact or effect on the development workplace *as a whole*? Why or why not?

*Other elements to consider:*

-What values do institutional advancement departments that you work for/have worked for emphasize as important?

-In your experience, how have institutional advancement departments handled MGO turnover and the constant need to recruit, hire, and retain talented development officers?

6. Is there anything else you want to add that we haven't covered?

*Other elements to consider:* Definition of organizational compassion: We can define compassion in the workplace as the organization's response to the pain and suffering of its employees and the way that an organization notices, feels, acts, and makes sense of painful events in the workplace. Did you see or experience organizational compassion in your current or previous workplace? How did it affect you? How did it affect your colleagues?

***End time:*** \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY.**

## **Appendix B: Email Recruitment Message**

Subject: Development workplace culture research project

Dear Major Gifts Officer,

My name is Christina Smith and I am a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. I am conducting my dissertation research on the idea of compassion in the higher education fundraising workplace.

I got your name from our CASE District IV regional directory, and I am hoping that you will consider participating in my study by agreeing to be interviewed.

Specifically, I am looking at how compassion in a college or university development office might influence a person's decision to stay in the job or leave for a different one. All responses will be kept confidential to the extent allowable by law, and individual responses will be reported using pseudo-names.

Participation in the study would include signing an informed consent form to be interviewed and a recorded interview on Zoom when you would be asked six (6) open-ended questions about your work experience as a development professional. The total time commitment should not exceed 35 minutes.

To qualify for this study, you must be currently employed at a public 4-year institution as a major gifts/development officer AND you must have voluntarily left at least one other institution (located in the state of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, or Texas) in the role of major gifts/development officer within the past five (5) years.

If you are willing to participate in the study, please respond to this email ([REDACTED]) or call me directly at [REDACTED]. You can also contact my doctoral advisor, Dr. Michael Miller ([REDACTED]) if you have any questions about participating.

Thank you for considering this request!

Warm regards,  
Christina

P.S. If you know someone who might be a good fit for this study, please feel free to forward this email to him/her or share my contact information so this potential participant can reach out to me directly. Thank you.

## Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Approval



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**To:** Christina Marie Smith

**From:** Douglas J Adams, Chair IRB Expedited Review

**Date:** 04/27/2021

**Action:** Expedited Approval

**Action Date:** 04/27/2021

**Protocol #:** 2103325243

**Study Title:** Should I Stay or Should I Go? Compassion Organizing and the University Advancement Workplace

**Expiration Date:** 04/11/2022

**Last Approval Date:**

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: Michael T Miller, Investigator

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