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Employee Engagement:

The Path to Understanding Public Sector Silent Heroes—

Millennial Accountants

A Dissertation Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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Doctor of Public Administration

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Division of Online and Professional Studies

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ABSTRACT

Millennials are the fastest growing generational cohort to enter the professional workforce. The workplace is changing, and public sector leaders need tools to attract, motivate, and retain the talent to fill the void left by baby boomers who are retiring in massive numbers. Engaging employees has been shown to increase productivity, efficiency, morale, and retention, and millennials indicated that they need and want to be engaged within their organizations. This research study explores the topic of millennial employee engagement by conducting a qualitative study using phenomenology to understand how millennials define employee engagement, their lived experiences, and the antecedents that influence their level of employee engagement. Twenty local public sector accountants were interviewed and confirmed that a universal definition of employee engagement would remain elusive. Drawing on relevant literature, individual and organizational employee engagement antecedents were selected and analyzed to determine if there is an impact on millennial public sector accountants. This study revealed that millennial public sector accountants were most influenced by management support, work/life balance, professional growth and development, having a voice, and providing technical expertise in order to help their organization serve the greater good. When millennials perceive that they will receive a benefit from their organization, they will then reciprocate with increased commitment and productivity. The results of this study may enable public sector leaders to understand how to engage millennials to bring out their greatest potential, and in turn, organizations will have the tools and resources to meet their organizational goals and mission and to provide the highest level of services to their citizens.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."
"I never lose. I either win or learn."

—Nelson Mandela

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the people who provided the foundation to make me the woman that I am today. My father Troy Bradford has always believed in me, supported, and loved me since I took my first breath. You have instilled in me the value of family, hard work, honesty, and integrity, and to always put God first in my life. I am fortunate to have the love of two mothers, Delois Bradford and Margit Perry, who have always loved me and supported me and have never left my side. Finally, the matriarch of our family is my beloved Granny, Sarah Russell. I am honored to be named after the woman who has always cheered for me, encouraged me, and loved me unconditionally. Thank you to my aunts, uncles and cousins who have also encouraged me along my journey. There are no words to express the admiration, love, respect, and appreciation that I have for each one of you. The woman that I am today is a result of the examples you all have set for me throughout your lives, and I am truly blessed and eternally grateful to have you as my family. I love you all with every breath in my body.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACO   Riverside County Auditor-Controller's Office

CBU   California Baptist University

EE   Employee Engagement

FOMO Fear Of Missing Out

IRB   Institutional Research Board

JD-R   Job Demands-Resources Model of Engagement

MP4   Motion Picture Experts Group Layer-4 Advanced Video Coding

OCB   Organizational Citizenship Behavior

POS   Perceived Organizational Support

PSS   Perceive Supervisor Support

SET   Social Exchange Theory

WLB   Work-Life Balance

YOLO You Only Live Once

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Millennial employees are the fastest growing generation, and they represent change and disruption to the workforce. This newest cohort to enter the professional workforce is anything but business as usual. They are very different from their senior generational cohorts. They are educated, highly technical, and ready to take over the workplace. They are a generation that is used to instant gratification. They download their music and books instead of going to the store to buy the latest book, album, or CD. Instead of going to the movie theatre, they use Netflix or YouTube and download a movie. They do not have to leave the comfort of their homes to shop when they can place an order with Amazon or Ebay and have their items delivered to their front door, sometimes within a few hours of ordering. They do not need to pick up the phone and have a conversation when they can send a text or "Like" a photo or comment, Facetime, snapchat, or post on Instagram. If they want something to eat, they order Door Dash or Grub Hub from their mobile app and track the delivery person all the way to their front door. If they want to go somewhere, they call Uber or Lift and are picked up at their front door. These days, millennials can earn a degree and never step foot on a college campus.

Millennials are redefining the rules in the workplace. They are looking for organizations that take an interest in their employees. They want to be inspired by leaders who not only have a vision for the organization but also can create a career path for their employees (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Millennials have proved they can be just as hardworking as their baby boomer and Generation X coworkers. Millennials are choosing to work smarter and not harder. Technology is a millennial's number one

resource. They expect to have the latest technology at their fingertips and will use it to its fullest advantage (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). They can communicate, research, and collaborate from their smartphones.

Rapper Drake coined the phrase YOLO, You Only Live Once, and FOMO is the Fear of Missing Out. These have become anthems to millennials (Ortiz, 2012). Millennials want to live and experience their lives to the fullest. They work to live not live to work (Deal & Levenson). Millennials deeply value their experiences of traveling and spending time with family and friends. They do not want to be stuck in an office for 50 to 70 hours a week like their parents. Millennials want to make a difference in the workplace, and they want to do it on their own terms. They want work to feel like home; they prefer the comradery of working in teams; they need to have feedback to ensure they are on the right track. They want meaningful work; they want to feel valued and accepted; they want to feel supported by their supervisor and the organization; they want to be committed to their organizations and not entertain the idea of leaving. They want their organizations to help them grow and develop, and in return, they want to help the organization achieve its mission and vision. Millennials want to be ENGAGED!

Engaged employees have been empirically proven to perform better. They experience positive emotions and are more confident and optimistic. They are able to mobilize their own job and resources based on the support, feedback, and developmental opportunities they receive from their organizations. Engagement induces feelings of happiness, joy, and enthusiasm. Engaged employees experience better health, and their positive influences are infectious, thereby transferring their engagement to other colleagues and team members (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The Gallup organization is

best known for its public opinion polling and based on 17 million employee engagement (EE) surveys; it revealed that only 29% of employees are engaged (Lavigna, 2013). What is clear is that more work must be done to improve EE, especially in the public sector.

Historical Background and Overview

There are over 100 million full-time employees in the American workforce, and the culture of organizations is experiencing rapid and significant changes. Millennial workers are overtaking the number of baby boomers and Generation X employees in the workforce (Gallup, 2017). The baby boomers and Generation Xers are known for their sense of loyalty and for staying within the same organization for decades. Millennials, on the other hand, have been characterized as having a lack of loyalty and being in search of an organization that will engage them and offer them developmental opportunities, supportive supervisors, and benefits and perks that will enhance their lives and the lives of their family members (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016).

In 2015, millennials made up 35% of the workforce, and by 2025, 75% of workers will be a millennial (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016; Kuhl, 2014). Although millennials have been sheltered by their parents due to the tragic events of 9/11 and the Columbine school shooting, they are highly confident and have become known as trendsetters (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Millennials are very optimistic and trusting, which enables them to be team oriented. Millennials are the best educated of all generational cohorts as they have been pushed to study hard and are able to take advantage of all the resources and technologies available to them (Howe & Strauss, 2000). On the other hand, the U.S. Department of Labor (2016) reported that millennial workers average less

than three years at an organization before they leave to pursue opportunities elsewhere. Organizations are faced with the task of learning to manage an entirely new generation of employees while at the same time leading public-sector organizations that are experiencing declining revenues, declining personnel, and the expense of filling vacant positions. It is imperative that public sector leaders create a culture that is conducive to supporting and engaging millennial employees, which may, in turn, influence an employee to reciprocate with increased levels of engagement, commitment, and productivity.

EE is a relatively new construct, and it has received substantial attention within the last 20 years. Both academicians and practitioners have failed to develop a universal definition of engagement and establish a common set of antecedents and consequences (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002; Truss, Delbridge, Alfes, Shantz, & Soane, 2014; Lavigna, 2013). Despite the confusion surrounding the general concept of EE, there is absolute consensus that EE thrives in demonstrating strong connections between organizations and individuals, which leads to positive and rewarding consequences for both (Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Lavigna, 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

William Kahn (1990) first coined the term *engagement* to mean the act of being physically, cognitively, and emotionally connected to the role an employee holds in an organization. Through the evolution of time, EE has been characterized as vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and also as a two-way relationship in which the employer strategically endeavors to engage employees into having a positive attitude toward the organization and its values and, in return, reciprocate with improved

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job performance that benefits the organization (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004). EE is vital in the building of commitment and retention among millennial workers.

The topic of EE has gained popularity within the last decade as scholars have tried to dissect this construct. In 2006, theorist Alan Saks provided empirical evidence that EE was indeed a meaningful construct. He sought to validate the effectiveness of EE as it had been referred to as "old wine in a new bottle" and as the new "flavor of the month" (Saks, 2006, pp. 601 and 612). This study evaluated six antecedents; thus, he recommended that future research be conducted to determine additional antecedents. He also recommended that studies identify antecedents as they pertain to a particular job, organization, or group (Saks, 2006). This study serves that purpose, as it studied a group of millennial public sector accountants who work for the County of Riverside.

In a 2014 study that Saks and Gruman conducted 8 years after Saks's initial engagement research project, they acknowledged what he called an explosion of research surrounding EE. They argued that there are many antecedents of engagement; however, it has been difficult to determine which ones are the best predictors of engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2014). They also argued that there have been very few studies on interventions for improving EE. They believed that researchers' top priority should be to seek an understanding of what causes EE (antecedents), the effect of EE on an employee (lived experiences), and the effect of EE on the employee and the organization (reciprocal exchange relationship; Saks & Gruman, 2014). This study is primed to close that gap in the literature.

A majority of existing EE research has applied a quantitative design approach and was focused on the private sector. In 2013, Brent A. Meyer researched multigenerational

public sector EE, with compensation as the dependent variable. This quantitative study

concluded that incentive compensation such as bonus pay, one-time lump sum forms of

variable pay, and also merit-based pay has led to elevated levels of EE; however, he

confirmed that compensation is not a millennial's greatest concern. Meyer (2013)

suggested that future studies utilize a qualitative or mixed-methods approach, which

would provide an opportunity for deeper understanding of factors other than

compensation, which may lead to increased EE.

Violet Swinton-Douglas (2010) penned a dissertation entitled *A

Phenomenological Study of Employee Engagement in the Workplace: The Employee

Perspective* in which she interviewed 20 individuals from a pharmaceutical company in

New York City. Participants discussed their experience of what they needed to remain

engaged and what they are able to do as leaders to promote the engagement of other

employees. Based on her interviews, six universal themes emerged: EE is important,

positive solutions exist for resolving the lack of EE or re-engaging employees who have

become disengaged, employees need to be empowered and challenged, employees are

committed, valuable and want to do their best, they generally have a positive attitude and

finally they want to make a difference or influence a situation or a positive outcome in

the workplace. Swinton-Douglas concluded her dissertation by noting that EE is

significant to other settings; thus, future studies should be conducted choosing other

industries (such as the public sector), and across multiple disciplines, to capture

additional insights (Swinton-Douglas, 2010). This recommendation highlights the need

to segregate specific industries and professions to determine what antecedents will

influence a particular set of individuals.

Elisabeth Parker (2015) conducted a study to expand the theory of engaging employees. She constructed the theory that employees journey through the following five phases to become engaged: assessment, discovery, adaptation, connectedness, and belonging. She noted that even further research is needed to understand the personal experience of an employee who becomes engaged at work. She suggested researching different populations of employees to understand how engagement evolves at different levels and professions (Parker, 2015). This research project studied only millennials and sought to understand their path to EE.

David M. Firely's dissertation in 2016 was titled *Retaining Generation Y: A Study of the Relationship Between Corporate Social Responsibility and Millennial Engagement in the Healthcare Industry*. He noted that

> future research design could use a qualitative, as opposed to quantitative methodology. Interviews conducted with millennials would broaden the richness of the study and potentially uncover abstract constructs not possible to capture through the use of a questionnaire. A specific characteristic could be observed and explored further using this research methodology. (Firely, 2016, p. 102)

Finally, Stephanie Franklin-Thomas (2016) set out to explore what intrinsic motivational factors millennial employees possess, then suggested that a qualitative phenomenology study is conducted to investigate millennial intrinsic motivation. As public servants, most are intrinsically motivated; this study sought to understand what intrinsic rewards lead to a public sector millennial's engagement (Franklin-Thomas, 2016). Collectively, this study endeavors to fill in all the gaps mentioned above and add to the academic literature.

Statement of the Problem

With the aging of the public sector workforce, organizations will have to replace those baby boomers who are retiring in record numbers in addition to Generation Xers who are also considering early retirement. Millennials are filling those vacancies at a time when studies have revealed that currently only a fraction of the entire workforce is engaged. When organizations lose their governmental accountants, they lose institutional knowledge that is critical to the fiscal oversight and reporting of public funds. Governmental accountants receive continuous training to remain in compliance with accounting codes and regulations. Maintaining an engaged workforce can help ensure that organizations are producing timely and accurate financial reporting in order to promote trust, transparency and commit to being responsible fiscal stewards of public funds. Public sector leaders have an obligation to learn how to engage this generational cohort as they cannot interact and manage them as they did with older cohorts. It is imperative that public sector leaders understand how to engage the newest cohort of millennial accountants and lead them on the path to engagement.

Although there is an abundance of empirical evidence to suggest that EE is linked to individual and organizational success, it has been argued that many public sector managers are unaware of the power and potential benefits of engagement, thus leading to lower levels of engagement (Lavigna, 2013). Lavigna (2013) hypothesized that managers are either disinterested in EE or do not know how to address EE. Public sector managers often confuse EE with employee happiness, and managers are less concerned with making employees happy (Lavigna, 2013).

Human capital is the public sector's most important and valuable resource; thus, the failure to make EE a priority can lead to the underutilization of employee talent and organizational performance and success. The general problem is that there is a lack of research directed at understanding EE from a public sector millennial's perspective. The specific problem is that organizational leaders, managers, and supervisors are not aware of what antecedents will lead to a millennial's engagement. The lack of knowledge will lead to losses of institutional knowledge and inefficiencies within organizations as well as increased costs related to high rates of turnover.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to identify how local county government millennial accountants define EE and to discover what antecedents they perceive to influence engagement in the workplace through their lived experiences. SET undergirds this study as it proposes that both employees and organizations can benefit from engaging in a mutually beneficial and rewarding reciprocal exchange relationship (Saks, 2006). The results of this study will contribute to the literature and contemporary research by exploring EE in the realm of public sector local government and proposing antecedents, which may influence millennials and have an impact on the organizations in which they serve. It is the belief that this research, although conducted on a local government level, can be applied throughout the entire public sector governmental umbrella.

The specific aims of the study are to provide public sector leaders with an alternative view of millennials' attitudes, behaviors, and work ethics through the lived experiences of local government public sector millennial accountants. This study also

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aimed to provide the knowledge and tools to enable public sector leaders, managers, and supervisors to understand how to engage millennial accountants toward a more beneficial and rewarding reciprocal exchange relationship that will provide benefits to both the employee and the organization. Lavigna (2013) credited the use of identifying antecedents of engagement as the most influential and most valuable analysis to gauge EE. Antecedents can distinguish the strengths that should be maintained while weaknesses can be addressed and course corrected.

Significance of the Study

A generational shift in the workforce shows a steady exodus of baby boomers, yet millennials are entering the workforce in droves. According to the Center for State and Local Government Excellence (2017), this shift is more pronounced in the public sector as there are more baby boomers who have reached their 20 years of service and are opting for retirement. The sudden wave of retirement and retirement-eligible employees is best described as a "silver tsunami" (Maciag, 2013, para. 6). Mass retirements can threaten the efficiency and effectiveness of public organizations if they are not able to retain millennials and pass along the institutional knowledge that has been developed over decades.

In 2017, Riverside County had just over 700 employees working in an accounting related position. This was a 15% decline from the 835 accounting positions that were filled in 2008. Of the 726 filled positions in 2017, millennials were in nearly 30% of them. Although the total number of positions is on a steady decline, the rate at which millennials are filling these positions appears to be in line with PEW Research Center findings, which project that by 2020, millennials will make up 50% of the global

workforce and by 2025, 75% (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016; Kuhl, 2014; Montes, 2017; Schawbel, n.d.).

Due to dramatic generational changes taking place in the organizations, there are no longer the levels of lifelong commitment that baby boomers exhibited. Generation Xers seek more flexibility and work-life balance, yet they have taken a proactive approach to their career development by seeking more degrees and experience within and outside their organization. Generation Xers are often seen as collaborative yet resistant to formal organizational rules. Millennials on the other hand work to live, and they are obsessed with relationships and career development (Deal & Levenson, 2016; Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). For these reasons, it is imperative that public sector leaders explore ways to engage this cohort of workers. Unlike Generation Xers, who rely on their advanced technical acuity, millennials place unusually high expectations on their supervisors and managers to mentor them toward their professional development and career goals (WMFC, n.d.). Recognition of this phenomenon will allow public sector managers to capitalize on developing a reciprocal relationship that can be beneficial to both the employee and the organization.

EE is a powerful force for organizational change and effectiveness. Building and maintaining EE may be able to ease the burdens caused by budget cuts, layoffs, and reductions in employee compensation and benefits (Lavigna, 2013). Preserving an organization's human capital investment through the use of EE is necessary to maintain institutional knowledge through the training, skills, and experience that have been provided to employees.

This research will give public sector employees an opportunity to articulate to leaders what steps they can take to maximize their investment in human capital. The goal is to receive investment dividends in the form of engagement, productivity, loyalty, and retention. This study will also contribute to an existing and evolving discussion among public sector leaders and human resource professionals regarding the reciprocal relationship that exists between employees and organizations. The ability to create a supportive environment that allows an individual to professionally grow and develop will lead to increased engagement and the preservation of institutional knowledge.

Overview of Theoretical Framework and Literature Analysis

Employee Engagement

In the last decade, the concept of EE has gained popularity in the professional and academic communities despite the fact that there continues to be confusion on the exact meaning of engagement. The term *engagement* has been used interchangeably to describe work engagement, job engagement, personal engagement, organizational engagement, team engagement, psychological engagement, and finally, EE. For the purpose of this research, the latter terms engagement and EE were used interchangeably as they are more applicable when describing the concept of engagement in relationship to millennials in the public sector workforce. There are a number of EE models that are discussed in great detail in Chapter 2. This chapter provides an overview of the seminal research that served as the basis for this research project.

William Kahn was one of the pioneers in EE and is credited with coining the term engagement in 1990. He defined engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express

themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Kahn's research shows that engagement allows individuals to become physically involved in the tasks they perform, cognitively vigilant, and directly connected to others in the service of work they are performing. Through engagement, an individual's sense of connection along with their deep sense of beliefs and values are then fully manifested (Kahn, 1990).

Kahn (1990) noted that engagement varies based on one's perception of the resources, benefits, meaningfulness, and the guarantees they perceive to have available to them. While experience was the main driver of resources, benefits, and guarantees, psychological meaningfulness was more closely aligned with work elements that created incentives for one to personally engage. Psychological meaningfulness, Kahn defined as "a feeling that one is receiving a return on investments of one's self in currency, or physical, cognitive, or emotional energy" (p. 704). Individuals want to believe that they make a difference and that they are useful and valuable to their organizations.

Alan Saks (2006) developed a definition of EE that is wholly consistent with the SET. Saks argued that engagement is related to organizational behavior; thus, he defined EE as "a distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance" (p. 602). Saks's definition sought to expand the understanding of engagement to include job engagement and organization engagement.

Job engagement refers to individuals being psychologically present in their role at work. Organizational engagement, on the other hand, refers to individuals being psychologically present in their role as an employee within an organization. This

expanded view, Saks argued, provided a stronger theoretical rationale for using SET to comprehensively explain EE as a mutual relationship between an organization and the employee.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The basic premise of SET is that a reciprocal exchange relationship exists between at least two parties. The reciprocal arrangement between the employer and the employee became the foundation for the SET. George C. Homans (1958) provided an introduction to SET; then, theorists John Thibaut, Harold H. Kelly, Richard Emerson, and Peter Blau continued the work and contributed to the body of SET literature. In 1959, Thibaut and Kelley published the first major book on SET titled *The Social Psychology of Groups*, in which they asserted that individuals choose which behaviors and actions they choose to exchange. To date, the most highly regarded and quoted social exchange theorist is Peter Blau (2008) who in 1964 first published *Exchange & Power in Social Life*.

George C. Homans (1974) is credited with first investigating the exchange relationship. Homans developed five propositions that he asserted will determine how human interactions impact the exchange relationship. Peter Blau (2008) expanded the research and posited that an exchange takes place when one party receives a service or benefit and the other party reciprocates. In an employment relationship, the exchange takes place when employees perform their duties and assignments in exchange for both tangible and intangible rewards (Blau, 2008).

Professional relationships are typically formed on the basis of two types of exchange relationships: economic exchange and social exchange. Blau defined economic

exchange as "one where the nature of the exchange is specified and the method used to assure that each party fulfills its obligations is the formal contract upon which the exchange is based" (p. 93). Social exchange, in contrast, involves favors that create future unspecified obligations; thus, these types of arrangements take time to develop and often rely on trust to fulfill those future obligations (Blau, 2008)

Economic exchanges are usually time limited whereas social exchanges are ongoing and indefinite. These relationships tend to serve as a psychological contract where there are mutual exchanges and expectations between the employee and the organization (Blau, 2008). The matching of expectations and their fulfillment are crucial to attaining positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and performance. Social exchange relationships seek to place a greater emphasis on long-term outcomes that have been developed through a trust relationship, rather than relationships with purely an economic focus. It is then the expectation that each party to the exchange relationship will act in good faith (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The nature of an exchange can emerge at two levels: an employee's exchange relationship with the organization and the direct exchange that forms with the employee's supervisor. The result of the exchanges provides a reciprocal arrangement that is better known as perceived organizational support (POS) and perceived supervisor support (PSS). POS and PSS are based on how much an employee perceives his or her organization and a supervisor values his or her contributions and cares about his or her well-being (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). These are the leading antecedents of EE.

Millennials

Millennials are part of the newest generational cohort to enter the workforce. Therefore, they will be working alongside the baby boomers and Generation Xers. Generational theory suggests that millennials are cohorts of people born at a common point in history who will experience the world in similar ways. In 1987, William Strauss and Neil Howe provided the foundation for the generational theory and were credited with coining the term millennials. Each generation is thought to share a common set of beliefs, values, and an overall collective identity that distinguishes it from other generations (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Millennials are commonly known as Generation Y but have also been referred to as trophy kids, generation next, net generation, Nexters, generation why (because they question everything), the Dot.com or Internet generation and echo boomers. The term echo boomers was due to a major surge of baby boomers giving birth between the 1980s and the early-2000s (Abrams & Von Frank, 2014). For the purpose of this research project, millennials are defined as those born between 1981 and 2000.

According to a report by PWC (2011), millennials are significantly more altruistic than both its Generation X and baby boomer cohorts. They are also highly ambitious, socially confident, and relational. This generation was raised with computers and the Internet, thus technology is a dominant force of influence. Because of their altruistic nature and advanced skill sets, millennials are attracted to public sector employers who can offer them more than good pay. Millennials are committed to personal learning, development, and career progression, yet they seek a greater work/life balance than other generational cohorts (PWC, 2011).

Millennial workers are the individuals leading social change in organizations. It is projected that millennials will be the largest generational cohort in the American workforce. The generational shift in the public sector workforce presents many challenges for public sector leaders, organizational bureaucracies, and the accounting profession. Accounting positions are "hard to recruit" due to the technical nature of the work performed. Professional standards are always changing. Thus, employers must place a high emphasis on training and development. It is critical to retain millennial accountants as their loss can have a severe impact on transparency and accountability in its reporting for citizens, investors, and other public agencies.

Research Questions

Baby boomers are retiring in record numbers, and millennials are filling those vacancies. This is more evident in the public sector. Maciag (2013) revealed that the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2012, public employees (especially those in public finance and administration) are among the oldest workers in the workforce. In 2012, the average age of a public sector employee was 51 years of age (Maciag, 2013). Today that would make them 57 years of age, and if they have not retired already, the majority will be leaving the workforce within the next 3 years.

In 2020, 2 years from now, millennials will be the majority cohort in the workforce. They have been labeled as entitled and needy when in reality they just want work-life balance and constant feedback. They do not want to be managed the same way as their older cohorts. They want to be engaged. There are many positive aspects of EE, yet every study has revealed that only a small percentage of employees are actively engaged. If organizations are to be successful and meet the needs and demands of their

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constituents, it is incumbent upon public sector leaders to understand how and what

antecedents are most influential to a millennial's level of EE. The following three

research questions sought to develop a deeper understanding of public sector millennials'

perception of EE.

Research Question 1: How do millennial public sector accountants define

employee engagement?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions, lived experiences, descriptions,

and understandings of employee engagement among millennial public sector

accountants?

Research Question 3: What antecedents do millennial public sector accountants

perceive as having the greatest influence on employee engagement?

Methodology

The goal of this study was to investigate how millennials define EE and what

antecedents they perceive will influence EE. Robert Lavigna (2013) agreed that verbatim

responses to EE analysis add to the richness of EE analysis. This further substantiates

that a qualitative phenomenological approach is the most appropriate methodology to

capture the true essence of a millennial's experience with EE.

A qualitative research study is a dynamic process that provides the forum for

employees to openly discuss their perceptions and reflect on their feelings in a natural

setting. Phenomenology is the study of people's shared experience from an individual's

unique perspective (Creswell, 2014). Using a phenomenological approach is the most

appropriate qualitative research method to fully extract information about the lived

experience of what constitutes EE among public sector accounting employees. The

specific behaviors that lead to EE continue to elude both researchers and practitioners. This study employed an interpretative phenomenological analysis strategy to explore in detail the meanings of particular organizational behaviors and analyze EE relationships with SET. This study will give millennials a voice and allow them to finally either confirm or dispel myths surrounding the workplace attitudes and behaviors.

Setting and Sample

Potential research participants must be permanent County of Riverside millennial employees who are between the ages of 19 and 36 years of age, have passed their initial probationary period, are in an accounting series position, and do not work in the Riverside County Auditor-Controller's Office. Participants participated in an online interview using GoToMeeting. It was the intent of the researcher to interview all millennials who agreed to participate; however, a minimum of 12 participants was enough to reasonably ensure data saturation according to researchers Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006). Their research has shown that on average, after 12 interviews, very few new themes emerge (Englander, 2012; Guest et al., 2006). When no new themes emerge, or additional data does not lead to more information, what is known as data saturation has been reached (Creswell, 2014; Englander, 2012).

Participants were recruited from a public information request that gave the names of permanent County of Riverside employees who were in a designated accounting series position and were born between the years of 1981 and 2000 (see Appendix A). The Riverside County Assistant Auditor-Controller also signed a research agreement allowing the researcher to use the list of names to recruit millennial accountants for the purpose of this study.

All millennials identified in the target population received an e-mail from the researchers California Baptist University (CBU) account. The e-mail contained an informational flyer (as shown in Appendix B) and general information regarding the study. The e-mail referenced a set of attachments that participants needed to sign if they agreed to participate in the researcher's study. The attachments included a formal letter of introduction (Appendix C), the Participant Informed Consent (Appendix D), which also gave consent to audiotape the interview, the confidentiality statement (Appendix E), and finally, the Research Participants Bill of Rights (Appendix F). Once a millennial chose to participate, he or she digitally signed and e-mailed the informed consent agreement back to the researcher's CBU account. The researcher then contacted the participant and set up a mutually acceptable date and time to conduct the interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

To gain an understanding of the lived experiences of public sector millennials, this research project utilized a semistructured interview process with 17 open-ended questions. A semistructured interview format enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions and probes to clarify a response or provide further understanding to the participant. An open-ended question could not be answered with a "yes" or "no"; thus, it enabled participants to provide meaningful, well-thought-out responses to the questions asked. Open-ended questions ensured that participants had the opportunity to fully express their thoughts and feelings regarding EE, supervisor and management behaviors, antecedents, and the reciprocation construct. Participants were encouraged to provide in-depth insight into their lived experience with perceptions of EE.

All online interviews were audiotaped through GoToMeetings. At the conclusion of the interview, the recording was downloaded and saved on the researcher's computer as a password-protected MP4 file. The MP4 data files from the audiotaped interviews were uploaded in NVivo and transcribed within 72 hours of the interview to keep perceptions, memos, and observations fresh in mind. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis. An alphanumeric coding system was assigned to each participant and was referenced on the interview transcription (i.e., MEE01 was assigned to the first employee participant; MEE02 was assigned to the second employee participant, etc.). The researcher performed due diligence by reviewing all interviews and comparing them to the MP4 file for accuracy and completeness. Once the transcripts had been reviewed for accuracy, the process of analyzing and interpreting the data began.

NVivo 12 Pro (2018) for Windows software was used to perform the data translation and coding of data into categories called nodes. Nodes represent themes, topics, concepts, ideas, opinions, or experiences. Each node was coded to additional subcategories as themes emerged. NVivo can retrieve, process, and rearrange documents and audio data sources as necessary. Themes were built upon given definitions of EE, antecedents that were identified to influence engagement, and behaviors that were characteristic of the millennial cohort. Key themes were further analyzed and evaluated alongside constructs, supporting empirical research, and theoretical rationales to determine if they supported or opposed literature review research. Data were analyzed until a point of saturation had been reached. That point occurred when all concepts and themes were identified, all research questions had been answered, and no additional themes emerged. There was no risk of the data aging. However, Creswell (2014)

suggested that all participant data collected during a research study should be securely stored for 5 years from the date of collection. Researchers must ensure that the data will not be compromised and fall into the hand of other researchers who might misappropriate it (Creswell, 2014).

Protection of Human Participants

As with most qualitative research, this study involved interactions with human subjects. The researcher sought approval from the CBU Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that the study was ethical and presented no risks to participants. In addition, the dignity, privacy, and interests of all participants were protected and respected. Audio recordings were kept in a locked safe, and file transcriptions were saved as a protected data file that was password protected and encrypted.

Because of the nature and intent to study a human phenomenon, it was imperative to ensure that all participants' identities were strictly protected. Research participants remained confidential, and their names were not identified in the study. Alphanumeric codes were used to protect their identity and provide an alternative method for ensuring appropriate member checking of information. Information that appeared to identify a particular organization remained confidential, as organizations were also identified using numbers or other appropriate pseudonyms.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are important aspects of this research study. Validity suggests truthfulness, authenticity, and credibility. Validity is achieved when there is a fair, honest, and balanced account of the construct or individuals being studied (Neuman, 2016). Reliability is equivalent to being dependable, stable, and consistent. According

to Neuman, validity and reliability are complementary concepts, yet they may conflict with one another as "reliability is a necessity to have a valid measure of a concept, however, it does not guarantee that the measure will be valid" (Neuman, 2016, p. 220). Together, validity and reliability seek to ensure the integrity and credibility of the research being performed and the finding being concluded.

In qualitative research, conducting interviews is considered a consistent and reliable technique to record observations (Neuman, 2016). Validity is realized when steps are taken to maintain the highest standards of conduct throughout the interview process. This includes strictly following guidelines or an interview protocol throughout the research process (Neuman, 2016). This project required questions that had the ability to elicit consistent responses. To produce reliable and valid questions, there needed to be precise terminology when phrasing questions. All questions avoided using difficult words, unnecessary jargon, and cumbersome phrases. Questions had to avoid making unwarranted assumptions about participants.

A high level of reliability can be obtained by asking all participants the exact set of questions. Participants were encouraged to speak openly and honestly with the knowledge that the researcher would protect their identity and all information gained during the interview process. To ensure the credibility of the participants' responses, interviews were audiotaped and notes were taken throughout the interview. There was a triangulation of data to ensure not only the consistency of data but, more importantly, the credibility of the interviews transcribed for this study (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 2010). Every effort was taken to assure that this study was both reliable and valid.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The design and methodology for conducting this study was based upon a need to understand the lived experiences of millennial accountants in serving in the public sector. The basic assumption was that participants interviewed would answer questions and engage discussions in an open and honest manner that reflected their lived experiences. Another assumption was that the researcher would accurately interpret the participants' perceptions (Moustakas, 1994). The overall assumption was that after the study, the findings would enrich the body of knowledge on the effective engagement of millennials in the workplace.

Limitations

Limitations are those factors the researcher cannot control. This study was conducted to determine the level of understanding of EE and the antecedents that lead to engagement in the local government public sector. Because qualitative phenomenological studies are often restricted to a small group of participants, this may have limited the perception of the phenomenon. Study participants consisted of 20 millennial accounting employees from the County of Riverside who chose to participate as volunteers. These employees held a wide variety of accounting positions in a number of departments throughout the County of Riverside.

A limitation defining this study included conducting semistructured interviews with participants having the appropriate background and ability to retrieve events related to the study. Limitations consisted of potential weaknesses that the researcher could not control such as the participants' perspectives, their meanings, their experiences, and the

image they portrayed of the public sector organization. Another limitation that can always prevail during an interview is whether the researcher understands the participant's statements, feelings, and perceptions. This can be more prevalent if the participant speaks in jargon that may be specific to their particular organization. The final limitation was that the researcher might have had a preexisting professional relationship with some of the participants from the study. The participants might have answered the questions to support or refute what they believed was the basis of the research.

Delimitations

This study had some delimiting factors. Delimitations are in the control of the researcher who set the scope and boundaries of the investigation. Delimitating factors included making a choice to limit the participation only to those identified in the millennial generations as they represent the newest cohort in the workforce and will be the largest generation in the workforce within the next 5 years. Another delimitation of the study was the relatively small participant group. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) asserted that qualitative phenomenological researchers rely almost solely on lengthy interviews of five to 25 individuals. The participant focus of the study included 20 millennials working in an accounting related position at the County of Riverside in the Southern California region.

The research was used to explore the understanding of EE and the antecedents that influence engagement from various professional levels of accountants at the county. Using data analysis for this study provided insight into the understanding of EE and its antecedents. Researching experiences and understanding the perceptions of the employees are the keys to new knowledge. The sample selected was based on the

population of millennial accountants from different organizations within the county, which allowed for multiple opinions while ensuring that the study remained within the allotted time for completing the research.

Definitions of Key Terms

To effectively explore the construct of EE and millennials, it is necessary to first define and clarify unique terms. Clear definitions of the terms *employee engagement, antecedents, commitment, satisfaction*, and *motivation* are essential to the current study. These and other key terms are defined below.

Public sector accountant. Employees who are in positions that have a fiduciary responsibility for the preparation, analysis, allocation, and reporting of fiscal matters for government entities.

Antecedents. "Constructs, strategies, or conditions that precede the development of employee engagement and that come before an organization or manager reaps the benefits of engagement-related outputs (e.g., higher levels of productivity, lower levels of turnover)" (Wollard & Shuck, 2011, p. 432).

Employee engagement. The evolution of a rewarding exchange relationship between an employee and the organization in which the employee's passion and commitment to fulfill the organization's mission and purpose are reciprocated with increased job satisfaction, motivation, rewards, and recognition.

Extrinsic rewards. Rewards such as pay, promotion, and recognition granted by the organization (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

Generational cohort. Individuals who share a common span of birth years and are thought to also share similar life experiences (Strauss & Howe, 1991). The following three generations are represented in the current workforce:

o **Millennials.** Individuals born between 1981 and 2000. Millennials are also commonly known as Generation Y, generation next, net generation, nexters, generation why, Internet generation, echo boomers, and trophy kids (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

o **Generation X.** Individuals born between 1961 and 1980. Generation X was known as the "latchkey" generation as this marks the first time when both parents were in the workforce leaving kids at home with little parental supervision (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

o **Baby boomers.** Individuals born between 1941 and 1960, just after World War II (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Intrinsic rewards. An employee's will to seek personal feelings of achievement and accomplishment though furthering an organization's mission and goals through the tasks they perform and the job they hold (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Modified Van Kaam method. An analysis method used to group research data by themes, analyze them for understanding, and identify recurring themes within the phenomenon being explored (Moustakas, 1994).

Norm of reciprocity. When employees perceive that their organization is supportive, they will then reciprocate by helping the organization achieve its goals (Blau, 2008).

Organizational culture. The fundamental values, principles, shared beliefs, systems, and management practices and actions that overtly express and reinforce core concepts (Denison & Mishra, 1995)

Organizational commitment. The belief **and commitment** in an organization's goals along with a desire to provide assistance in the achievement of those goals (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974).

Perceived organizational support. Employees' belief that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011).

Perceived supervisor support. Employees' general views concerning the extent to which supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002).

Social exchange theory. Exchange of tangible or intangible activity between the employee and the organization (Blau, 2008).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 of the study is an introduction and statement of the problem, the purpose, the research questions, the significance of the study, and the definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature. It addresses the following topics: EE, millennials, public sector, and SET. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in the study, including the research design, population, and instrumentation. There is a discussion of the process to gain research approval and informed consent from study participants together with information on validity and reliability. The chapter goes on to describe the procedures for data collection and the plan for data analysis. Chapter 4

presents the results of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses and analyzes the results,

culminating in conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a synthesis of the existing literature relevant to employee engagement (EE) and the millennial generational cohort. This chapter addresses the transformation taking place in the public sector environment as there is a mass exodus of baby boomers with institutional knowledge leaving the workplace and an influx of millennials entering the workforce. The research includes current, historic, and seminal literature found in published peer-reviewed articles, books, and dissertations. There is an examination of the body of knowledge relating to EE and its antecedents and consequences, social exchange theory, and millennial generational cohort characteristics. Furthermore, there is a discussion regarding public sector organizations and how EE is unique in the public sector compared to the private sector. Finally, this chapter briefly discusses the accounting profession within the context of a public sector organization.

Chapter Overview

This chapter begins by providing an overview of the surveyed literature's key themes and search terms (i.e., employee engagement, meaningfulness, safety, availability, vigor, dedication, absorption, generational cohorts, millennial, and public service) and the academic search engines used to support this investigation. Next, the chapter discusses the background and overview of EE and analyzes the definitions of engagement. There is a lengthy discussion of the major models of EE and the antecedents and consequences of EE. The chapter then examines the theoretical frameworks of social exchange theory (SET) that support the conceptual framework of this study.

The primary focus of this study was to examine millennials' perception of EE and what they perceive to be the antecedents of EE. This study also attempted to determine whether public sector millennials view EE and its antecedents as a reciprocal give and take exchange relationship between the employee and the organization.

Millennials

Millennials are the generational cohort of individuals born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. A generational cohort is characterized as individuals who share a common span of birth years and are thought to also share similar life experiences (Howe & Strauss, 1991). There are no definitive start and end birth years; therefore, for this study, millennials are defined as those individuals born between 1981 and 2000. Millennium is a period of time equal to 1,000 years; thus, millennials refers to the generation that was coming to age at the turn of the millennium. Howe and Strauss (2000) used the term millennials, as the members of the generation, to feel distinct from the other cohorts. Millennials are commonly known as Generation Y but have also been referred to as generation next, generation me, net generation, Nexters, generation why (because they question everything), the Internet generation, generation.com, and echo boomers (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The term echo boomers was a term used to describe the major surge of baby boomers who gave birth between the 1980s and the early-2000s (Abrams & Von Frank, 2014).

In 2016, with 79.8 million millennials in the United States, the U.S. Census Bureau has projected that they are the largest living generation by population size (Montes, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2017). According to the Association of Government Accountants, statistics report that millennials make up only 25.9% of

government employees compared to 37.8% of millennials in the private sector (Harrison, Mercier, Pika, & Chopra, 2018). Millennials have been the most studied and scrutinized generation of all times (Kiiru-Weatherly, 2016). No other generation has garnered this much attention, and this may be due to the very different views they hold in life compared to previous generational cohorts (Holt, Marques, & Way, 2012).

Millennials as a generation have witnessed their share of devastation through 9/11 and the war on terrorism. They have frequently been exposed to school shootings that first began with Columbine High School then they learned of the government failures when responding to Hurricane Katrina. Millennials experienced a booming technological dot-com economy and the aftermath or Great Recession. The millennial cohort is the most ethnically and racially diverse group of individuals and has been primarily credited with putting Barack Obama, the nation's first African American, in the White House as President of the United States, then reelecting him for a second term. Millennials have shared these historic events and their personal experiences on social media using smartphones and tablets.

A transformation is taking place in today's workforce as baby boomers are retiring in record numbers. An article published by the Government Finance Officers Association noted that within the public sector, an aging workforce coupled with the economic recession has created significant human capital challenges. They go further to note that all levels of government must engage their workforce (Reichenberg, 2015).

Baby boomers are those individuals born between 1941 and 1960. In 2018, baby boomers will range in age from 58 to 77 years old and many have or will be retiring in the very near future. Generation Xers, born between 1961 and 1980, will be between the

ages of 38 and 57. Older Generation Xers are beginning to retire, and many in the public

sector have chosen to take early retirement. Millennials are entering the workplace in

droves, and by the year 2020, they will make up more than 50% of the U.S. workforce

and, by 2025, 75% (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016; Kuhl, 2014; Montes, 2017; Schawbel,

n.d.). The cohort behind millennials (named Generation Z or post-millennials) will be

turning 17 this year; they will begin graduating from high school and entering the

workforce within the next year. Each generational cohort possesses its own unique and

distinctive characteristics; however, this research project focuses exclusively on

millennials. There may be references and comparisons to other cohorts, but the

discussions will center on millennials.

Millennials are more intelligent than most people think. Research shows that

63% of millennials have a bachelor's degree, making them the most educated generation

(Jenkins, 2017). They are also characterized as being diverse in their opinions, having

high self-esteem, being self-centered, multitaskers, and extremely team oriented (Holt et

al., 2012). Millennials grew up in an environment that promoted instant gratification.

When they wanted to hear music, they could download it; when they wanted or needed to

buy something, they could go online; and with websites like Amazon, it could be ordered

and delivered that same day (Montes, 2017).

In studies conducted over time, Twenge's (2010) research has shown that

millennials have weaker work ethics as work is not a driving factor in their lives, they

value their leisure time, and they want freedom and more work-life balance. Unlike

Generation Xers, millennials are less concerned about material possessions. During the

years of the Great Recession, many millennials watched their parents lose their house and

material possessions that they worked hard to attain. Millennials learned to enjoy the experiences life had to offer rather than spend their life working for tangible items that could easily be taken away. Millennials want to work but for much different reasons than baby boomers and Generation Xers wanted to work. For other cohorts, work provided financial stability; for millennials, working is a way to give back, to align their values with an organization's values, and to work to be able to enjoy experiences both professionally and personally (Montes, 2017).

Researchers Jennifer Deal and Alec Levenson (2016) studied millennials around the globe and discovered that, fundamentally, millennials have the same professional goals as their older cohorts. Millennials want a meaningful job that pays well; they want to be surrounded by people they like and trust; they want access to training, developmental and growth opportunities; and they want to be shown appreciation and recognition for their efforts (Deal & Levenson, 2016). What is unique is the way in which millennials go about achieving these goals, goals that lead to one being engaged to the tasks, duties, and organizations in which millennials serve.

It is Strauss and Howe's (1991) opinion that a millennial's mission is not to tear down old institutions but rather to build new ones up, which is precisely what is occurring in today's workforce. Millennials want and need feedback and rewards. They were taught that if everyone participated in an activity, they would receive a reward. Everyone who showed up got a trophy, and there were no winners or losers. Millennials want this same mentality in the workforce, and understandably, it has caused conflict and if not addressed, can lead to disengagement.

With the influx of millennials in the workforce, public sector leaders should identify ways to effectively engage millennials. Leaders cannot rely on techniques that may have worked with other cohorts as empirical evidence has proven that there are significant generational differences regarding employee engagement between baby boomers and millennials (Fenzel, 2013). This study set out to explore the path millennials take to EE.

Employee Engagement

EE is a relatively new construct, and it has received substantial attention within the last 20 years. The term engagement has been used interchangeably to describe work engagement, job engagement, personal engagement, organizational engagement, team engagement, psychological engagement, and finally, EE. For the purpose of this research, the latter terms engagement and EE are used interchangeably as they are more applicable when describing the concept of engagement in relationship to millennials in the public sector workforce. Table 1 shows a search of ProQuest by years and the number of peer-reviewed articles and dissertations written about engagement. Over 97% of all employee engagement literature has been written since 2000, and 81% has been written within the last 7 years.

Both academicians and practitioners have failed to develop a universal definition of engagement, establish a common set of antecedents and consequences, and agree on a measurement tool to assess engagement (Lavigna, 2013; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Truss et al., 2014). Despite the confusion surrounding the general concept of EE, there is an absolute consensus that EE thrives in demonstrating strong connections between organizations and individuals, which leads to positive and rewarding consequences for

both (Bakker & Leiter, 2010; Lavigna, 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Schaufeli (2014) declared that "engagement is easy to recognize in practice however, it is very difficult to define" (p. 15).

Table 1

Employee Engagement Academic Research

Employee Engagement Academic Research								
Engagement	Before 2000	2000 to 2009	2010 to 2017	Total	Before 2000	2000 to 2009	2010 to 2017	Total
Employee engagement	214	2,248	15,191	17,653	1%	13%	86%	100%
Work engagement	147	1,637	14,486	16,270	1%	10%	89%	100%
Personal engagement	1,014	3,184	6,431	10,629	10%	30%	61%	100%
Job engagement	39	357	1,951	2,347	2%	15%	83%	100%
Psychological engagement	115	586	1,556	2,257	5%	26%	69%	100%
Team engagement	14	142	954	1,110	1%	13%	86%	100%
Organizational engagement	27	157	734	918	3%	17%	80%	100%
Total peer reviewed articles	**1,570**	**8,311**	**41,303**	**51,184**	**3%**	**16%**	**81%**	**100%**
Employee engagement	2	45	417	464	0%	10%	90%	100%
Work engagement	1	18	356	375	0%	5%	95%	100%
Personal engagement	2	18	35	55	4%	33%	64%	100%
Job engagement	1	11	124	136	1%	8%	91%	100%
Psychological engagement	2	11	17	30	7%	37%	57%	100%
Team engagement	-	6	7	13	0%	46%	54%	100%
Organizational engagement	1	6	21	28	4%	21%	75%	100%
Total dissertations	**9**	**115**	**977**	**1,101**	**1%**	**10%**	**89%**	**100%**
Employee engagement	216	2,293	15,608	18,117	1%	13%	86%	100%
Work engagement	148	1,655	14,842	16,645	1%	10%	89%	100%
Personal engagement	1,016	3,202	6,466	10,684	10%	30%	61%	100%
Job engagement	40	368	2,075	2,483	2%	15%	84%	100%
Psychological engagement	117	597	1,573	2,287	5%	26%	69%	100%
Team engagement	14	148	961	1,123	1%	13%	86%	100%
Organizational engagement	28	163	755	946	3%	17%	80%	100%
Total academic literature	**1,579**	**8,426**	**42,280**	**52,285**	**3%**	**16%**	**81%**	**100%**

Note. Adapted from OneSearch (https://eds-b-ebscohost-com.libproxy.calbaptist.edu/eds/search /advanced?vid=0&sid=fd83ba6a-5636-4c9f-844f-f0302315c6ba%40sessionmgr104)

Engagement develops a passion for work and enables employees to demonstrate happiness (Kahn, 1990) and gratitude (Fehr, Fulmer, Awtrey, & Miller, 2017) in the roles they perform. Engaged employees become absorbed in their work and find it more

meaningful and rewarding (CPS HR Institute for Public Sector Employee Engagement, 2017). Engaged employees are highly motivated, have a sincere desire to add value to their team and organization (Kahn, 1990), are enthusiastic in the performance of their work duties, and display elevated levels of energy (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). Engaged employees proactively work toward challenging goals, delivering results, and partnering with organizations to serve the public while collaborating with those organizations in the fulfillment of their mission and vision. Consultant firm BlessingWhite (2013) summarized that engagement goes far beyond commitment and passionate employees, but engagement creates individuals who are fully aligned with the mission and vision of their organizations and make a conscious and distinct effort to contribute to its success.

According to Gallup's (2017) *State of the American Workplace* released in February 2017, in 2016, 33% of U.S. workers were engaged, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and organizations. This was the highest percentage Gallup (2017) had ever achieved in its 15-year history of tracking employee engagement. The percentage of engagement has risen by 3% since 2012. Gallup's global results revealed that only 15% of workers worldwide are engaged; thus, Gallup declared that the United States and the World is in an employee engagement crisis.

In public sector organizations, employee engagement allows organizations to achieve strategic goals and provide timely and responsive citizen services from employees who are innovative and highly valued by their organizations (CPS HR Consulting, 2017; Lavigna, 2017). According to a study conducted by the Institute for Public Sector Employee Engagement, private sector employee engagement was shown to

be significantly higher than in the public sector. Study results indicate that 44% of private sector employees are fully engaged compared to 38% of public sector employees. Of the public sector employees, local government employees appeared more engaged (44%) than federal employees (34%) and state employees (29%; CPS HR Consulting, 2017; Lavigna, 2017).

Numerous studies on employee engagement have been conducted with a vast array of agencies and professions, all in search of a common definition of engagement. There has also been extensive research to develop a standard list of antecedents and consequences and to test each one separately. A majority of the studies have been concentrated in the private sector and not on a specific generation.

In 2005, Alan Saks's (2006) study was one of the first empirical tests of the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement that was based on the social exchange theory. Saks surveyed 102 private industry employees whose average age at that time was 34 years old and found that perceived organizational support and job characteristics were primary antecedents to engagement. He also concluded that job satisfaction, organizational commitment, employee retention, and organizational citizenship behavior were all positive consequences to engagement (Saks, 2006). A team of researchers from Virginia Commonwealth University and North Carolina State University surveyed approximately 1,251 employees from state and local government to study the relationship of perceived organizational and supervisor support to employee engagement. Jin and McDonald (2017) concluded that positive organizational and supervisor supportive relationships influence employee engagement as they provide opportunities to learn and grow on the job. Employee engagement continues to amass

researchers seeking to crack the code to organizational success. It is imperative to understand the historical origins of this construct before building upon it.

Historical Origins of Employee Engagement

William A. Kahn (1990) is credited with coining the term "engagement" to explain the behavioral approach of expressing a person's "preferred self" in behaviors that promote connections in the workplace (p. 700). In 1990, Kahn performed an ethnographic qualitative study that sought to study "attachment" as it relates to organizational life. It was Kahn's intention to advance the studies performed in the early 1960s by Erving Goffman. Goffman pioneered the theory that employees can exhibit behaviors that indicate whether they are truly attached to the roles they perform within an organization. Goffman's research focused on face-to-face encounters while Kahn took a psychological approach to his research (Kahn, 1990).

Kahn (1990) embedded himself with camp counselors and interviewed members of an architectural firm to develop the theoretical framework that illustrates the process and behaviors employees utilize to express themselves. Kahn called this process "engagement" and defined it as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). Kahn's research premise was that an employee's psychological experience serves as the driver to the attitudes and behaviors that an employee will display in the workplace. The results confirmed that personal engagement does promote physical, cognitive, and emotional connections to work and others when employees are performing their job duties.

Kahn's (1990) theoretical revelation of employee engagement has developed into a massive construct with a vast number of tenets. Both historical and current literature continue to evolve, and most research projects start off by simply trying to define engagement. Regardless of how employee engagement is defined, many agree that it is highly subjective, making research studies and testing even more intriguing. The next section discusses the evolution and models of employee engagement.

Definitions and Models of Employee Engagement

William Kahn and the Needs Satisfying Model of Engagement

Employee engagement pioneer William Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement is the most popular and most quoted of all engagement definitions. When Kahn described engagement, he believed that engagement allows employees to put a great deal of effort into their work because they can identify with it (Kahn, 1990). Kahn's model of engagement became known as the needs-satisfying approach, which focused exclusively on personal observations that describe how employees become involved and connected to their work roles. Kahn's model identified three psychological conditions that inhabit one's work roles: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. He argued that in order for one to engage, he or she has to ask him/herself three questions:

(1) How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance?

(2) How safe is it?

(3) How available am I to do so? (Kahn, 1990, p. 703).

These questions act as a two-way psychological contract that provides clear benefits and protective guarantees when employees are provided with the resources they need to fulfill their obligations (Kahn, 1990).

Meaningfulness is achieved when employees find purpose, significance, and importance in the functions they perform. Employees want to know that their work is valued and worthwhile to the organization (Lee, Idris, & Delfabbro, 2016). Employees seek opportunities and incentives that allow them to connect with the role and functions they perform. They want to make a difference that is exhibited through the competence and professional growth they display in the performance of their tasks and duties (Kahn, 1990).

Meaningfulness is seen as a reciprocal arrangement as it has been characterized as receiving a return on investment (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). When employees engage in meaningful work, they reciprocate with a sense of devotion and dedicate their hard work and talents to their organizations. When individuals experience a feeling of meaningfulness, they gain a sense of responsibility, take ownership, and are more engaged; thus, they invest their full selves in their roles. The organizations and citizens they serve benefit exponentially from meaningful work (Crawford, Rich, Buckman, & Bergeron, 2014). Engaged employees are also able to transform work that may be viewed as nonmeaningful into work that is fulfilling and meaningful (Byrne, 2015).

Kahn's (1990) next psychological condition was safety. Safety is achieved through creating an environment or culture that is nonthreatening, predictable, and a place where engagement can be fostered (Kahn, 1990). A safe environment allows employees to professionally grow and develop through some degree of trial and error without fear of negative consequences and punishment. Creating relationships is a key factor to safety as it promotes an environment that is supportive and trusting. An organizational approach that promotes an open and supportive environment has been

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shown to make employees feel safer (Crawford et al., 2014). Coaching and mentoring by management also contributes greatly to a safe culture as does allowing an employee to exercise some degree of autonomy in the execution of his or her duties (Kahn, 1990). Employees need to believe that their managers and supervisors are competent enough to create a plan that will safely guide them along their professional path (Kahn, 1990). When employees perceive that there are elements of safety, they are willing to reciprocate by engaging more completely in their work roles.

The last of Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions is availability. Availability is associated with the amount of physical energy, emotional strength, and psychological resources that employees perceive to have in order to engage. To be engaged requires energy and strength to overcome distractions from insecurities, worries, and frustrations that are predictors of disengagement (Kahn, 1990). Insecurities can arise from being preoccupied with thoughts of how an employee feels he or she is being perceived and judged by others and whether or not such judgments are actually occurring (Kahn, 1990). These insecurities can cause employees to question their fit within an organization and will ultimately detract from their being engaged.

Kahn's (1990) model was validated through a study conducted by May et al. (2004). Their study revealed that the presence of all three psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability resulted in significant positive relationships with engagement, with meaningfulness exhibiting the strongest relationship to engagement. Their study further concluded that work-role fit and employee development are a direct path to meaningfulness and are antecedents for engagement. Organizational culture and perceived support are paramount to achieving psychological safety; hence, they are also

antecedents for engagement. Finally, there is a significant relationship between resources, rewards, and recognition to the condition of availability, which also serve as antecedents for engagement (May et al., 2004).

Christine Maslach and Michael Leiter's Burnout Model of Engagement

In 1997, Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined engagement as the combination of energy, involvement, and efficacy with each being the direct opposite of burnout or being emotionally exhausted, emotionally drained, and being detached, cynical, and ineffective. Employees are most effective when they feel energetic and are involved in activities that are personally fulfilling. Maslach and Leiter's model of engagement, dubbed the positive antithesis of burnout, assumes that burnout and engagement are on opposite ends of a spectrum. It is their view that when employees become disengaged, they are then feeling burnout. Their positive engagement feelings of energy turn into exhaustion; involvements become cynicism, then efficacy turns into ineffectiveness (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that occurs after exposure to long-term exhaustion, workplace stressors, and a loss of interest in the workplace (Maslach et al., 2001). To counter the effects of burnout, Maslach et al.'s (2001) study revealed six antecedents that can lead an employee to engagement: a sustainable workload, feelings of choice and control, appropriate rewards and recognition, supportive community work, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). These antecedents are shaped within the culture of the organization and are very similar to those proposed by May et al. (2004) in relation to Kahn's (1990) model of engagement.

Maslach and Leiter (1997) posited that engagement starts with management as they should dedicate their time and efforts to building a sense of community within their organization. Management is responsible for creating a culture that builds engagement through employees who can feel energetic and ready to commit their time and effort toward meaningful work activities (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Maslach and Leiter's model concluded that one way to prevent burnout is to promote engagement, and engagement then enables organizations to better respond to those they serve.

Three-Factor Model of Engagement

The next most popular and often quoted definition of engagement takes a slightly different approach than Maslach and Leiter's (1997) burnout theory. Theorists Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) defined engagement as "a positive and fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 74). This definition implies that through engagement, individuals are more fulfilled through the work they perform, which is more advantageous than having feelings of emptiness and burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a).

This team of theorists created a model that has become known as the three-factor model of engagement. This model has also been characterized as a positive antithesis of burnout; however, it does not presume that engagement can be measured or assessed as the direct opposite of burnout using the same instruments. It seeks instead to operationalize engagement on its own, measuring the concepts of vigor, dedication, and absorption independently, using different instruments (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

In the three-factor model, vigor is described as being full of energy and possessing the willingness and mental resilience to invest in one's work despite any

potential difficulties. Dedication is a strong sense of pride, enthusiasm, inspiration, commitment, and involvement in the work being performed. Finally, absorption allows one to be completely engrossed and carried away in the execution of his or her duties. Employees become fully attached and concentrate only on their task at hand, oftentimes ignoring their surroundings and losing track of time (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor is considered the direct opposite of the burnout concept of exhaustion, and dedication is opposite of cynicism. Absorption and the burnout concept of reduced efficacy are not viewed as direct opposites but rather as distinct aspects of their respective concepts (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The three-factor model concludes that "rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement is a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual or behavior" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74).

Schaufeli et al. (2002) criticized Kahn's (1990) model as being a comprehensive theoretical model of engagement however it failed to operationalize the engagement construct. They also concluded that Maslach and Leiter's (1997) burnout measurement tool was difficult to study as both concepts of engagement and burnout are on opposite ends of a continuum and nearly impossible to study with one single instrument. Schaufeli et al.'s (2002) model still considers burnout and engagement as direct opposites; however, they proposed that each concept should be independently measured with different measurement tools. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004b) developed an instrument called the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which can independently test the three dimensions of engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This

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instrument has been used widely throughout research studies and has become the standard used to test and study levels of engagement.

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model of Engagement

The JD-R model has been described as a balanced approach to explaining the negative aspects of burnout and the positive aspects of engagement (Angelo & Chambel, 2013). In 2001, Researchers Bakker and Demerouti developed the JD-R model with the premise that job stress is compartmentalized into two categories: job demands and job resources, and together they can lead to high levels of engagement and organizational commitment in addition to excellent work performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Job demands describe jobs that require sustained physical, cognitive, or emotional efforts and skills that are often associated with exhaustion and burnout. Examples of job demands are time, work pressure, adverse work environments, role ambiguity, role conflicts, and role overloads (Hakanen & Roodt, n.d.). While these job demands are not necessarily negative, they can become job stressors as individuals strive to meet the organizational demands. Conversely, job resources are the working conditions that enable individuals to use the physical, cognitive, or emotional skills they have acquired in the fulfillment of professional growth, learning, and developmental goals. Job resources aid in the achievement of work goals and the reduction of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job resources can occur at an individual and organizational level. Job resources commonly studied include career opportunities, job security, performance feedback, supervisor support, role clarity, task variety, and a positive organizational climate (Rothmann & Joubert, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b)

The JD-R model aims to suggest the use of job resources as a way to reduce an employee's level of exhaustion that subsequently leads to a depletion of energy. Job resources provide the motivational potential that leads to high employee engagement, low cynicism, and superior performance. Job resources are proposed to foster learning through proper feedback opportunities and to stimulate growth, learning, and development through job competence and supportive reciprocal exchange relationships. This model has been applied over a number of studies (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007; Bakker, Van Emmerick, & Van Riet, 2008; Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Hakanen & Roodt, n.d.; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007) and has concluded that while job resources do diminish job demands, every occupation and organization has their own unique set of demands and resources. Generally, it is understood that "employees who are surrounded by resourceful job characteristics are more likely to experience a general feeling of psychological freedom (i.e., autonomy), interpersonal connectedness (i.e., belongingness), and effectiveness (i.e., competence), which in turn explains why they feel less exhausted, and more vigorous in their jobs" (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & Lens, 2008, p. 288). Employees who encounter many job demands, in contrast, seem to be more likely to have their basic psychological needs thwarted and therefore experience more exhaustion. Similar to other models discussed, JD-R contends that supervisory support, coaching, autonomy, and performance feedback are effective antecedents to engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Saks's Model of Engagement

The final model of engagement that was examined is that of Alan Saks, which has been widely considered a multidimensional approach to engagement (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017). Saks (2006) defined engagement as the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of his or her roles. It was Saks's belief that his model is similar to other models in their ability to identify antecedents that enable one to engage. However, his model goes a step further in developing an argument behind the reasons why individuals chose to respond to these antecedents with varying forms of engagement. Saks's model promotes the idea that SET provides the theoretical rationale for influencing employee engagement. Saks asserted the notion that one way for individuals to repay or reciprocate the benefits they perceive from their organizations is through engagement.

According to Saks (2006), SET argues that individuals operate under a norm of reciprocity that involves a reciprocal exchange transaction, which occurs between two parties. The basic principle of SET is that once a relationship has been established and one party provides resources or any type of benefits, it then creates an obligation by the other party to reciprocate with action or deed.

Saks's (2006) model of engagement segregated employee engagement into two categories: job engagement and organizational engagement based on the notion that individuals serve multiple roles within an organization. Saks's model argues that individuals repay the organization through their level of engagement, and engagement is thereby influenced through the antecedents of job characteristics, perceived

organizational support, perceived supervisor support, rewards and recognition, procedural justice, and distributive justice (Saks, 2006).

Consistent with Kahn's (1990) model, Saks concurred that employees can engage or bring themselves fully into their work roles through cognitive, emotional, and physical resources, but this takes place only as a result of responding and reciprocating to an organization's actions (Saks, 2006). Employees who perceive higher organizational and supervisor support are more likely to reciprocate with greater levels of engagement. Also, engaged employees are more likely to have a higher quality relationship with their organizations thus leading to an increased reciprocal exchange of positive attitudes, reduced turnover intentions, and greater organizational citizenship behavior (Saks, 2006). The exchange transaction that Saks posited in his model is the bridge that connects the construct of employee engagement from employee action to the reciprocal exchange achievement of organizational goal through the theoretical basis found in SET.

Other definitions of engagement include Macey and Schneider (2008) who viewed engagement as a process. Trait engagement begins with having a positive outlook on life and work. These individuals view the world and their work with a sense of enthusiasm. This then leads to state engagement or the feelings of energy and absorption through being involved, committed, and empowered and satisfied in one's job. Once an employee achieves trait and state engagement, he or she then experiences behavioral engagement that is giving more of oneself or discretionary effort in the execution of his or her duties and achievement of goals. Employees at this state will exhibit positive organizational citizenship behavior and will be more proactive, expand their roles, and be more adaptive to the needs of the organization (Macey & Schneider,

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2008). Macey and Schneider acknowledged that there are many facets to employee

engagement, which have led them to conclude that engagement comprises a tightly

integrated set of antecedents that are clearly identifiable constructs with relationships that

lead to a common set of consequences or outcomes.

In 2001, Nancy Rothbard, who was inspired by Kahn's (1990) work, described

engagement as having two critical components: attention and absorption. Attention refers

to one's cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends simply thinking about

her or his work role while absorption is the degree of intensity or concentration that an

individual places on her or his work role (Rothbard, 2001). Rothbard (2001) likened

absorption to Csikszentmihalyi' s (1990) concept of flow whereby one becomes

completely engrossed in the engaging process of creating something. Flow is a state of

concentration so intently focused that it amounts to absolute absorption in an activity

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). She concluded that engaging in multiple work roles can be

enriching and allows employees to be in the flow and engaged in their job duties.

More recently, Zinta Bryne (2015), who also ascribed to Kahn's (1990) model of

engagement, defines engagement as follows:

> A moment-to-moment state of motivation wherein one is psychologically present
>
> (i.e., in the moment) and psychophysiologically aroused, is focused on and
>
> aligned with the goals of the job and organization, and channels his or her
>
> emotional and cognitive self to transform work into meaningful and purposeful
>
> accomplishment. (p. 15)

To simplify that definition, Bryne believed that employee engagement is a state of

motivation where one is fully attentive to and connected to his or her current task. Bryne

also described this as a flow experience and made the distinction that employees can experience high levels of engagement without demonstrating energy through physical movements or actions (Byrne, 2015). Engagement is often in the form of psychological arousal of senses that allows employees to focus on tasks and be in the flow.

Many adjectives have been used to describe engagement and the antecedents that influence employee engagement. Each description and model may have had its own nuances; however, they all concluded that engagement describes a desirable condition that signifies involvement, commitment, passion, and enthusiasm in the performance of their duties. Engagement unquestionably results in increased job satisfaction, greater retention, and a stronger allegiance to the organization. Table 2 is a listing and the evolution of common definitions for engagement. For the purposes of this study, employee engagement is defined as the evolution of a rewarding exchange relationship between an employee and the organization where the employee's passion and commitment to fulfill the organization's mission and purpose are reciprocated with increased job satisfaction, motivation, rewards, and recognition.

Employee Engagement Antecedents and Consequences

Employee engagement has been described in a multitude of ways ranging from the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles (Kahn, 1990) to a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by energy, involvement, efficacy, vigor, absorption, flow, dedication, passion, and so forth. With each description, a number of antecedents have been proposed on how to achieve or influence engagement. This section discusses those antecedents that are most relevant to millennials and a public sector organization as researchers have noted that public service organizations require a

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Table 2

Evolution of Employee Engagement Definitions

#	Date	Name	Definition	Reference
1	1990	William A. Kahn	The harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employee and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance.	Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, *33*, 692-724
2	1997	Michael P. Leiter and Christina Maslach	A concept composed of three elements—energy, involvement and efficacy, each being the direct opposite of one of three burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of efficacy.	Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (1997). *The truth about burnout: How organizations cause personal stress and what to do about it*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
3	1999	Thomas W. Britt	Being personally responsible for and committed to one's job performance	Britt, T. W. (1999). Engaging the self in the field: Testing the triangle model of responsibility. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *25*(6), 696-706.
4	2001	Michael P. Leiter, Christina Maslach and Wilmar B. Schaufeli	A persistent, positive affective-motivational state of fulfillment in employees that is characterized by vigor, dedication, absorption.	Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52,* 397-422.
5	2001	Nancy Rothbard	An employee's psychological presence in or focus on role activities or "being there," but goes further to state that it involves two critical components: attention and absorption. Attention refers to "cognitive availability and the amount of time one spends thinking about a role," while absorption "means being engrossed in a role and refers to the intensity of one's focus on a role."	Rothbard, N. P. (2001). Enriching or depleting? The dynamics of engagement in work and family roles. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *46*(4), 665-684. https://doi.org/10.2307/3094827

Table 2 (*continued*)

#	Date	Name	Definition	Reference
6	2002	James K. Harter, Frank L. Schmidt, and Theodore L. Hayes	An individual's involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work and is based in an employee's experience, inclusive of long-term emotional involvement, and is an antecedent to measures of job satisfaction.	Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement and business outcomes: A meta analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*(2), 268-279.
7	2002	Taly Dvir, Dov Eden, Bruce J. Avolio, and Boas Shamir	The energy invested in the follower role as expressed by high levels of activity, initiative, and responsibility.	Dvir, T., Eden, D., Avolio, B. J., & Shamir, B. (2002). Impact of transformational leadership on follower development and performance: A field experiment. *The Academy of Management Journal*, *45*(4), 735-744.
8	2002	Wilmar B. Schaufeli, Marisa Salanova, Vicente Gonzalez-Roma, and Arnold B. Bakker	A "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." Vigor refers to the level of energy and mental resiliency used to complete work, willingness to work hard, and to persist when challenged. Dedication denotes enthusiasm for work, commitment, strong involvement, and pride. Absorption represents being fully focused and deeply immersed in the work.	Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., Gonzalez-Roma, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *3 (1)*, 71-92. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015630930326
9	2003	Debra L. Nelson and Bret L. Simmons	When employees feel positive emotions toward their work, find their work to be personally meaningful, consider their workload to be manageable, and have hope about the future of their work.	Nelson, D. L., & Simmons, B. L. (2003). Health psychology and work stress: A more positive approach. In J. C. Quick & L. E. Tetrick (Eds.), *Handbook of occupational health psychology* (pp. 97–119). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
10	2003	Towers Perrin	The extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work, in the form of extra time, brainpower and energy	Towers Perrin. (2003). *Working today: Understanding what drives employee engagement*. Retrieved from http://www.keepem.com/doc_files/ Towers_Perrin_Talent_2003(TheFinal).pdf

Table 2 (*continued*)

#	Date	Name	Definition	Reference
11	2004	Amy E. Colbert, Michael K. Mount, L. A. Witt, James K. Harter, and Murray R. Barrick	A high internal motivational state	Colbert, A. E., Mount, M. K., Harter, J. K., Witt, L. A., & Barrick, M. R. (2004). Interactive effects of personality and perceptions of the work situation on workplace deviance. *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, *89*(4), 599-609.
12	2004	Dilys Robinson, Sarah Perryman and Sue Hayday	A two-way relationship between employer and employee, in which the employee holds a positive attitude toward the organization and its values.	Robinson, D., Perryman, S., & Hayday, S. (2004) *The drivers of employee engagement*. Brighton, England: Institute for Employment Studies.
13	2004	Douglas R. May, Richard L. Gibson, and Lynn M., Harter	How individuals employ themselves in the performance of their job. Furthermore, engagement involves the active use of emotions and behaviors in addition to cognitions. (Closely related to the constructs of job involvement and flow)	May, D. R. Gilson, R. L., & Harter, L. M. (2004) The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology, 77*, 11-37.
14	2004	Fredric D. Frank, Richard P. Finnegan and Craig R. Taylor	The amount of discretionary or voluntary effort put in by the employees in their task	Frank, F. D., Finnegan, R. P., & Taylor, C. R. (2004). The race for talent: retaining and engaging workers in the 21st century. *Human Resource Planning, 27*(3), 12-25.
15	2004	Ray Baumruk, Hewitt Associates	Emotional, mental and intellectual commitment to the organization	Baumruk, R. (2004). The missing link: the role of employee engagement in business success. *Workspan, 47,* 48-52.
16	2005	Rich Wellins and Jim Concelman	Passion, commitment, extra effort—the illusive force that motivates people to high performance or manifests itself as high energy, commitment, job ownership and pride, productivity, loyalty, discretionary effort, wise use of time, passion, excitement, execution, and bottom-line results.	Wellins, R., & Concelman, J. (2007, February). Culture of engagement. *Leadership Excellence Essentials*. p. 19.

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Table 2 (*continued*)

#	Date	Name	Definition	Reference
17	2005	T. J. Erickson	Engagement is above and beyond simple satisfaction with the employment arrangement or basic loyalty to the employer characteristics that most companies have measure for years. It is about passion and commitment the willingness to invest oneself and expend one's discretionary effort to help the employer succeed.	Erickson, T. J. (2005, May 26). Testimony submitted before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.
18	2006	Alan M. Saks	"A distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that are associated with individual role performance." The degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles differentiated employee engagement into two parts, job engagement and organizational engagement. Job engagement is related to performing one's own job or role at work and organizational engagement means performing one's own job as an employee of the organization.	Saks, A. M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *21*(7), 600-619. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02683940610690169
19	2006	Gallup Organization	Employees who are passionate about their jobs and feel a strong connection to their employers	Gallup. (2006). Gallup study: Feeling good matters in the workplace. Retrieved from http://gmj.gallup.com/content/20770/gallup-study-feeling-good-matters-workplace.aspx
20	2006	Katie Truss, Emma Soane, Christine Edwards, Karen Wisdom, Andrew Croll, Jamie Burnett	Passion for work	Truss, C., Soane, E., Edwards, C., Wisdom, K., Croll, A., & Burnett, J. (2006). *Working life: Employee attitudes and engagement 2006*. London, England: CIPD.

Table 2 (*continued*)

#	Date	Name	Definition	Reference
21	2008	American Society for Training and Development	"Those mentally and emotionally invested in their work and in contributing to their employer's success."	American Society for Training and Development. (2008). Learning's role in employee engagement. An ASTD research study. Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press.
22	2008	William H. Macey and B. Schneider	A broad construct consisting of state, trait, and behavioral forms that connote a blend of affective energy and discretionary effort directed to one's work and organization. EE is a process whereby trait engagement (the inclination or orientation to experience the world from a particular vantage point and to view life and work with enthusiasm) determines state engagement (feeling of energy, absorption, satisfaction, involvement, commitment and empowerment), and leads to behavioral engagement (discretionary effort) the ultimate goal.	Macey, W. H., & Schneider, B. (2008). The meaning of employee engagement. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 1,* 3-30. Retrieved from http://www.benschneiderphd.com/Macey-Schneider_IOP_March_08.pdf
23	2008	Towers Perrin	Personal satisfaction and a sense of inspiration and affirmation they get from and being a part of the organization people who put additional discretionary effort in their work and beyond what is considered 'enough'. They have the desire and commitment to do the best they can and make a measurable contribution to an organization's performance"	Towers Perrin. (2008). A roadmap for driving superior business performance. International Survey Research. Global Report: Tower Perrin Global Workforce Study. 1-30. http://www.towersperrin.com/tp/getwebcachedoc?webc=HRS/USA/2008/200805/SWP_onepager.pdf Towers
24	2009	Ken Blanchard Companies	An individual's persistent, emotionally positive, meaning-based state of well-being stemming from continuous, reoccurring cognitive and affective appraisals of various job and organizational situations, which results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviors	From Engagement to Work Passion

Table 2 (*continued*)

#	Date	Name	Definition	Reference
25	2010	Brad Shuck and Karen Wollard	An individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes	Shuck, B., & Wollard, K. (2010). Employee engagement & HRD: A seminal review of the foundations. *Human Resource Development Review, 9*(1), 89-110. https://doi.org10.1177/1534484309353560
26	2010	Edward M. Mone and Manuel London	Someone who feels involved, committed, passionate and empowered and demonstrates those feelings in work behavior	Mone, E., & M. London (2010). *Employee engagement through effective performance management: A practical guide for managers.* New York, NY: Routledge.
27	2010	Kevin E. Kruse	Emotional commitment an employee has to the organization and its goals, resulting in the use of discretionary effort	Kruse, K. E. (2010). *Employee Engagement 2.0: How to motivate your team for high performance. A real-world guide for busy managers.* Scotts Valley, CA: Createspace.
28	2010	Michael P. Leiter and Arnold B. Bakker	A positive and fulfilling affective-motivational state of work-related well-being that can be seen as the opposite of job burnout	Bakker, A. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2010). *Work engagement: A handbook of essential theory and research.* New York, NY: Psychology Press
29	2010	Bruce Louis Rich, Jeffrey A. Lepine and Eean R. Crawford	The simultaneous investment of cognitive, affective, and physical energies into role performance	Rich, B. L., Lepine, J. A., & Crawford, E. R. (2010). Job engagement: Antecedents and effects on job performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, *53*(3), 617-635. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2010.51468988
30	2011	Michael S Christian, Adela S Garza & Jerel E Slaughter	A broad construct that involves a holistic investment of the entire self in terms of cognitive, emotional and physical energies	Christian, M. S., Garza, A. S., & Slaughter, J. E. (2011), Work engagement: A quantitative review and test of its relation with task and contextual performance. *Personnel Psychology, 64*(1), 89-136
31	2012	Forbes Magazine	The emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals'	Kruse, K. (2012, June 22). What is employee engagement? Forbes. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2012/06/22/employee-engagement-what-and-why/#38717b427f37
32	2013	Blessing White	Aligning employee's values, goals, and aspirations with those of the organization to achieve sustainable employee engagement required for a thriving organization	BlessingWhite. (2013). *Employee engagement research update: Beyond the numbers: A practical approach for individuals, managers, and executives.* Retrieved from http://blessingwhite.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Employee-Engagement-Research-Report-2013.pdf

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Table 2 (*continued*)

#	Date	Name	Definition	Reference
33	2013	Michael Bradley Shuck and Karen K Wollard	An individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes	Schuck, M. B., & Wollard, K. K. (2013). A historical perspective of employee engagement: An emerging definition. In M. S. Plakhotnik, S. M. Nielsen, & D. M. Pane (Eds.), *Proceedings of the eighth annual college of education & GSN Research Conference* (pp. 133-139). Miami, FL: Florida International University.
34	2014	The National Council on Federal Labor Management Relations	Employee engagement is a multi-faceted construct consisting of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components, which are distinct from job satisfaction. Employee engagement is characterized by employee passion and commitment to their work and organization. An employee who feels engaged in their workplace has a greater willingness to put forth-extra effort, to take risks, and to behave in ways that benefit themselves, their coworkers, and their organization.	National Council on Federal Labor-Management Relations (2014). Working group update on employee engagement. Paper presented at the National Council on Federal Labor-Management Relations, Washington, DC.
35	2015	Emma Karanges, Kim L Johnston, Amanda T Beatson & Ian Lings	The extent in which employees are willing to commit both emotionally and rationally within their organization, how long they are willing to stay as a result of that commitment, and how dedicated they are to their work.	Karanges, E., Johnston, K., Beatson, A., & Lings, I. (2015). The influence of internal communication on employee engagement: A pilot study. *Public Relations Review, 41,* 129-131. https;//doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.12.003
36	2015	Zinta Bryne	A moment-to-moment state of motivation wherein one is psychologically present (i.e., in the moment) and psychophysiologically aroused, is focused on and aligned with the goals of the job and organization, and channels his or her emotional and cognitive self to transform work into meaningful and purposeful accomplishment.	Byrne, Z. S. (2015). *Understanding employee engagement theory, research, and practice.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Table 2 (*continued*)

#	Date	Name	Definition	Reference
37	2016	The U.S. Office of Personnel Management	An employee's sense of purpose that is evident in their display of dedication, persistence and effort in their work or overall attachment to their organization and its mission and the degree to which employees think, feel, and act in ways that demonstrate high levels of commitment to the mission, goals, and stakeholders of their organization	Building an engaging workplace. Retrieved from https://www.fedview.opm.gov/2016FILES/Engagement_Drivers_Background_and_Summary.pdf
38	2017	The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board	A heightened connection between employees and their work, their organization, or the people they work for or with. Engaged employees find personal meaning in their work, take pride in what they do and where they do it, and believe that their organization values them.	U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board. (2008). *The power of federal employee engagement.* Retrieved from https://www.mspb.gov/mspbsearch/viewdocs.aspx?docnumber=379024&version=379721&application=ACROBAT
39	2018	Tanya S. Harris	The evolution of a rewarding exchange relationship between an employee and the organization where the employee's passion and commitment to fulfill the organization's mission and purpose are reciprocated with increased job satisfaction, motivation, rewards and recognition.	Harris, T. (2018). *Employee engagement: The path to understanding public sector silent heroes: Millennial accountants* (Current dissertation)

deeper understanding of antecedents that will encourage public servants to engage (Musgrove, Ellinger, & Ellinger, 2014).

Employee engagement antecedents are defined as "constructs, strategies or conditions that precede the development of employee engagement and that come before an organization or manager reaps the benefits of engagement-related outputs" (Wollard & Shuck, 2011, p. 432). Consequences are the actual engagement-related outputs. This research project categorized antecedents consistent with Wollard and Shuck's (2011) levels of individual antecedents and organizational antecedents. Individual antecedents are those that are closely aligned to individuals and their personal development while conversely, organizational antecedents are constructs and strategies that are applied throughout the organization to aid in the engagement and development of all employees (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). Figure 1 identifies both the individual and organizational antecedents as well as consequences that are examined as part of this research.

Individual Employee Engagement Antecedents

In Alan Saks's (2006) examination of employee engagement antecedents and consequences, he makes a distinction between job and organizational engagement. Job engagement is focused on individual performance; thus, it is consistent with the proposed individual level antecedents and organizational engagement is consistent with organizational antecedents (Saks, 2006; Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Many of the individual level antecedents, such as meaningful work and perceived support, can be measured at the organizational level, but for the purposes of this study, they were examined on an individual level basis. This research was also based on the foundation that employee engagement is the basis for a reciprocal relationship that exists

in harmony with the organization. The antecedents can be based on an individual level of an employee, yet without the antecedents there can be no progression to organizational antecedents and consequences.

Individual Antecedents to Employee Engagement	M I L L E N N I A L S	Organizational Antecedents to Employee Engagement	E n g a g e m e n t	Consequences to Employee Engagement
Absorption Dedication Employee Motivation Meaningful Work Role Fit Perceived Support Vigor Work / Life Balance Autonomy/ Feelings of Choice & Control		Authentic & Supportive Organizational Culture Clear Expectations & Feedback Job Control Job/Task Challenge Mission & Vision Job Resources & Training Perception of Workplace Safety Rewards & Recognition		Employee Job Satisfaction Employee & Career Develpment Organizational Commitment Decreased Employee Turnover Intention Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Reciprocal Social Exchange Relationship

How do Millennials define Engagement and the antecedents they preceive to achieve it?

Figure 1. Individual and organizational employee engagement antecedents and consequences.

Absorption. Absorption is an antecedent from the three-factor model that describes an employee being fully attached and engrossed in his or her work while

ignoring his or her surroundings and losing track of time (Schaufeli et al., 2002). When employees are absorbed in their work, there is a high degree of intensity that enables them to concentrate on their job tasks. If a task is extremely difficult, full absorption can push an employee to his or her limits in order to meet his or her goals and complete his or her tasks (Blau, 2008). When employees enjoy their job and the work they do, it creates an opportunity to experience that level of absorption.

Although millennials have been labeled as entitled and not willing to work hard, the reality is millennials are hardworking and will work long hours when they have a project or assignment to complete (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). When millennials are working on a team project, they will often stay late and help another team member even if their portion is complete. Millennials want variety in their work as they do not like routine, redundant, and repetitive work. Millennials can easily get absorbed in work they enjoy and find meaningful (Deal & Levenson, 2016).

Dedication. Dedication is characterized by a strong psychological involvement in one's meaningful work and "by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, commitment and challenge" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Public service has been referred to as a noble calling. Public opinion and trust may have diminished, yet public employment is viewed as honorable as employees are often dedicated to serving others (Pattakos, 2004). Dedication can occur at many levels. Employees can be dedicated to their profession, their organization, their job, or to the work they perform. Dedicated employees exhibit high levels of engagement that can produce long-term effective and beneficial reciprocal exchange relationships.

Employee motivation. Employee motivation produces energy, direction, and persistence and leads to being productive (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation is connected to the work that one performs and her or his relationship to it. Motivation has frequently been segregated into a set of internal (intrinsic) and external (extrinsic) motivational forces that determine the "form, direction, intensity, and duration of the behavior" (I. E. Perry, 2016, p. 20).

Intrinsic motivation is an individual's natural proclivity to engage in a task or activity and to move toward assimilation, spontaneous satisfaction, and exploration, which is vital in social and cognitive development (Ryan & Deci, 2000). An individual who is intrinsically motivated will seek out challenges to expand her or his knowledge and capacity. Studies reveal that millennials are highly intrinsically motivated by the work they perform. They want work that is interesting and that they perceive will help them achieve their long-term career plans (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Extrinsic motivation is the performance of an activity to attain a separate outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivators are outside an individual's natural inclination; thus, Ryan and Deci (2000) conceded that extrinsic rewards can undermine and diminish intrinsic motivation and the reason for performing a task.

Public service motivation is a genuine altruistic motivation to serve the interest of others (Ertas, 2016). Anthony Bertelli (2007) explained that public servants have a higher level of job involvement that is linked to having public service motivation and being intrinsically motivated to remain in public service and in the positions they hold.

Meaningful work/work role fit. Meaningfulness is a key component to Kahn's (1990) definition of employee engagement. An employee perceives her or his work is

meaningful when he or she feels worthwhile, useful, and valuable. Meaningful work

makes one believe that he or she is making a difference and not being taken for granted in

her or his roles and the organization (Kahn, 1990). Meaningful work is vital to attaining

full employee engagement and it also allows one to feel a deeper connection to the job,

the organization, and the other individuals who are jointly in pursuit of a common goal

and mission (Kouzes & Posner, 2016).

Studies conducted by the Gallup organization confirm that employees seek jobs

that are meaningful as it is their sincere desire not only to have gainful employment but

also to contribute to the success of the organization they work for. Employees do not

want to feel like they are just an employee number; they want to have a voice, contribute,

link their personal goals to that of the organization, and seek maximum engagement to

fulfill its mission and vision (Gallup, 2017). Millennials have a desire to work in an

organization with a purpose and values. They have a genuine passion for what they do

and want to make meaningful contributions toward the organization's mission (Ferguson

& Morton-Huddleston, 2016).

According to Kouzes and Posner (2016), employees are more than three times as

likely to stay with their organizations when they feel their contributions are meaningful

and significant. When work is viewed as a calling, as public sector employees often do,

employees have been shown to experience greater levels of engagement, job satisfaction,

and a sense of worthiness (Kouzes & Posner, 2016). The benefits experienced from

meaningful work far outweigh the benefits of simply receiving a paycheck for performing

a job.

In addition to work being meaningful, Kahn (1990) went to great length to stress the importance of role fit in his introduction to engagement. The word *role* is mentioned 134 times in "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work" whereas engagement is only mentioned 117 times. This gives an indication of the gravity of roles. Roles allow individuals to be seen in a manner that is consistent with their true identities, values, and beliefs and make one feel special and important to his or her organization (Kahn, 1990). Status and influence can be gained through an individual's roles.

Bakker and Leiter (2010) described work role fit as having two aspects: (a) a fit between an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities that one may possess compared with the demands and needs of the job/organization and (b) the fit between an individual's needs and desires compared to the needs provided or available on the job or within the organization (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). Individuals tend to seek out work roles and opportunities that allow them to express their authentic self (May et al., 2004). Meaningful work and role fit are complementary as research suggests that as work roles are aligned with an individual's identity, it provides the opportunity for individuals to contribute to and shape the nature of the work environment and the goods and services it provides while allowing for a more meaningful work experience (May et al., 2004).

Millennials want to make a difference; they want to work in a place of purpose and make an impact (Crossman, 2016; Jenkins, 2017). Millennials measure the success of their career by how meaningful they perceive their work to be (Jenkins, 2017). Ninety-two percent of millennials say they want to help make the world a better place and their preference is to work for a socially responsible organization whose mission they

believe in (Deal & Levenson, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2016). Although compensation is an important consideration to millennials, the ability to contribute to society while they can professionally grow and develop is equally if not more important (Deal & Levenson). When millennials choose organizations whose mission they identify with, it feeds their altruistic nature, which in turn increases their ability to engage. Research has shown that both meaningful work and work role fit are one of the strongest antecedents of engagement and that individuals who choose jobs and organizations that are compatible with their personal characteristics experience a higher level of engagement, job satisfaction, empowerment, and organizational commitment (May et al., 2004; Rich et al., 2010).

  Perceived organizational support. The impetus for perceived organizational support (POS) grew out of the organizational support theory. This theory argues that if an organization values and cares about an employee's contributions and meets their socioemotional needs, the organization will be rewarded with increased work efforts. Eisenberger called this phenomenon perceived organizational support (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). POS provides employees with the assurance that the organization will uphold their unspoken psychological contract to be a reliable partner who can be counted on to reward employees' efforts and provide support and aid when needed (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). When the organization fulfills the employee's perception and meets his or her needs, there is an underlying expectation of reciprocation of work productivity and commitment; thus, both parties benefit from this exchange transaction.

Millennials want to feel connected to their organizations. They want their organization to value the contribution they are making to the organization's mission and vision. A millennial's perception and connection to the organization sets the foundation for a millennial's career development and future opportunities as they perceive that the organization truly cares about their success and well-being (Deal & Levenson, 2016).

Perceived supervisor support. Perceived supervisor support is directly linked to POS as employees tend to view supervisors as an agent or representative acting on behalf of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Supervisors have direct daily contact with employees while also having influence with the leadership of an organization. An employee's favorable perception of her or his supervisor has a direct impact on perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Favorable perceived organizational and supervisory support reflects a genuine concern for the welfare of employees and includes practices such as training, development experiences, job security, and job autonomy. When employees perceive that their organization and supervisors are supportive, they will reciprocate by helping the organization achieve its goals. This, in turn, is positively linked to employee commitment, trust, and employee engagement (Blau, 2008).

Millennials believe that good managers and supervisors are considerate and kind, they care about the needs and feelings of others, they encourage employees to work together in groups, they are enthusiastic in a way that inspires commitment, they strive for excellence, and they communicate a vision that others can relate to (Deal & Levenson, 2016). When millennials feel overloaded and need help completing assigned tasks and projects, they expect their supervisors to jump in and help get their work done. They want to be mentored and guided but not told specifically how to complete a task.

Millennials do not want to be micro-managed (Montes, 2017). Deal and Levenson's research revealed that millennials want a supervisor they can seek coaching and advice from as they will feel more engaged if they perceive to receive the support and resources they need to be successful.

Millennials want to be inspired and motivated. They want someone to look up to and someone they can follow who truly cares about their well-being. Research has shown that millennials respond better to managers who can coach them and provide them with the feedback they need to grow and develop (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). If millennials do not feel valued, supported, and appreciated, they will disengage and are four times more likely to resign and leave in search of an organization where they can experience stronger relationships and greater support (Deal & Levenson, 2016; Kouzes & Posner, 2016).

Research has suggested that creating a supportive workplace climate is one of the most important antecedents to engagement (Saks, 2006; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). This includes the need to understand and differentiate the dynamics of providing organizational support versus what individuals need personally to feel supported.

Vigor. Vigor is described as being full of energy and possessing the willingness and mental resilience to invest in one's work despite any potential difficulties (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Feelings of invigoration connote positive energy, balance, and pleasantness or contentment (Shirom, n.d.). In studies performed by Shirom (n.d.), it was revealed that job characteristics that enable employees to focus on significant tasks lead to positive feedback and experience of vigor. Shirom also noted that vigor represents a positive and

effective experience in the workplace that can be the conduit to a reciprocal relationship between vigor and job performance.

Work-life balance (WLB).   The term WLB is used to describe the means by which an organization seeks to help employees find a balance between managing work and family (Hoffman & Cowan, 2008). According to the Society for Human Resource Management, the term WLB was coined in 1986 but existed in the 1930s when W.K. Kellogg Company realigned work shifts that resulted in increased morale and efficiency (Lockwood, 2003). According to a Gallup poll, 53% of employees say a role that allows them to have greater WLB and better personal well-being is "very important" to them (Gallup, 2017, p. 26). WLB takes on greater importance when it is perceived to be a benefit or substitute when employers, such as the public sector, are restricted in the amount of pay or extrinsic motivators it can offer employees.

Millennials are not willing to work 50 to 70 hours a week like their parents (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). That is not to imply that millennials are not willing to work hard. Millennials are diligent and conscientious hard workers who thrive when taking on meaningful and challenging tasks, assignments, and projects; however, they would rather not surrender their personal and family time on a regular and consistent basis (Kouzes & Posner, 2016). Contrary to popular beliefs, millennials are willing to sacrifice a higher salary for more WLB. They refuse to compromise on missing their children's activities, family gatherings, and other important events like their parents did for work. Millennials want to be responsible and dedicated, but they want a flexible work schedule that will enable them to lead a fulfilling life (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009).

WLB has been one of the most celebrated values proposed by the millennial cohort. Of millennials, 88% surveyed wish they could have greater flexibility with their work schedules (Jenkins, 2017). A 2011 study revealed that millennials valued WLB over financial rewards (Harrison et al., 2018). Their mentality is that they work to live, not live to work unlike older generational cohorts (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016). Many millennials prefer to work remotely or at least have a schedule that allows them to be flexible yet still productive (Tulgan, 2016). They want time to enjoy doing what they want to do and being with family and friends. Many view millennials as entitled because they want to have a fulfilling and vibrant life outside of work. Starting with their first day on the job, they believe they should have WLB. Millennials are willing to work beyond their normal work hours and take on heavy workloads, yet they want balance and a life outside of work. Deal and Levenson (2016) found that 63% of millennials say that their work demands interfere with their personal lives.

Autonomy/feelings of choice and control. In Kahn's (1990) discussion of engagement, he advanced the position that autonomy has an impact on the meaningfulness of work one performs as it creates a sense of ownership and control. Feelings of choice and control also give the perceptions of freedom, independence, and discretion in the planning and execution of their job duties and functions (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

Ninety-nine percent of millennials feel that it is important to have autonomy and flexibility in getting their work done (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Millennials want to have a choice over their schedule and their work assignment (Jenkins, 2017; Tulgan, 2016). A popular but accurate generalization of millennials is that they do not like performing

work that is uninteresting (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Millennials do not like performing tasks that are routine and repetitive in nature and in their opinion, boring (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Millennials want to have greater autonomy to perform work that is more interesting, meaningful, and challenging. This has caused some dissension in the workplace as older generations feel that younger and more inexperienced workers should first be grateful to have boring and repetitive work as they should "pay their dues" before they can dictate the type of work they want to perform (Deal & Levenson, 2016). The misnomer is that instead of acting entitled and demanding, studies reveal that millennials are simply seeking more variety in their day-to-day activities that will help ease the burden of routine work (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Increased work flexibility has proven to make millennials more effective and productive in their work tasks (Jenkins, 2017).

Organizational Employee Engagement Antecedents

Organizational antecedents are those that drive the development of employee engagement at an organizational level. These antecedents are imperative not only to driving engagement and development but they are also instrumental in achieving the organization's mission, vision, and goals (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Authentic and supportive organizational culture. An organization's culture is defined by its beliefs, values, norms, and traditions, and these elements serve as a critical component to a millennial's success and engagement. An organizational culture refers to the employee's perception of his or her workplace and employees' engagement thrives when employees perceive their organization to be open, supportive, and encouraging (Bakker et al., 2007).

Ninety-eight percent of millennials feel that developing close ties with their coworkers is important to them, and in fact, it enables them to be more engaged and committed to their organizations (Deal & Levenson, 2016, p. 117). Because having close ties at work is so critical to millennials' success and engagement, they place great emphasis on an organization that values working in teams. Teamwork gives millennials the opportunity to have face-to-face interactions rather than virtual interactions that many are accustomed to with social media. Millennials are natural team members when they understand the goals of the organization (Ferguson & Morton-Huddleston, 2016). Millennials have been shown to thrive and are willing to work late and voluntarily spend time to help other team members who have not finished their work (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Most millennials prefer to work in a team environment rather than working alone. Deal and Levenson (2016) discovered that a millennial's attitude toward her or his team is often a direct reflection on a millennial's attitude toward the organization, and those attitudes and behaviors serve as a reciprocal exchange relationship.

Millennials reportedly do not prefer environments that are highly political. Millennials do not want to be in an organization where pay and promotions are perceived to be based on politics, and they cannot speak up and critique the system. Millennials feel that in a politicized organization, it is best to remain quiet, which is contrary to their nature (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Having an organizational culture that promotes a collaborative environment and is not political can allow millennials to flourish and become engaged. Otherwise, millennials may become disengaged and stop actively contributing to meeting the organization's mission and vision.

Clear expectations and feedback. Feedback is when an individual receives information regarding his or her performance as a basis for growth and development. Effective feedback cultivates an environment of learning and increases job competence and the likelihood of the employee feeling engaged and achieving his or her work goals (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). Feedback has been shown to promote an employee's psychological meaningfulness as it allows one to evaluate growth and progression toward achieving goals. Feedback elicits feelings of being valued and appreciated and promotes a healthy, trusting, and rewarding relationship (Crawford et al., 2014).

Millennials have been accused of being needy and clingy because they want to know how they are doing at all times. They want continuous feedback and affirmation; 72% of millennials surveyed want accurate and consistent feedback in order to feel fulfilled in their jobs (Jenkins, 2017). Millennials want to be provided with a specific list of criteria that they perceive will ensure their success. They do not want to be told the specific steps in how to perform a job; however, they crave one-on-one coaching to ensure they remain on task and are able to successfully achieve their goals. Millennials want constant feedback and it is their expectation that performance reviews are performed in a timely manner as any delay in their minds signals negative feedback and the perception that their employer does not value their efforts (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009).

Simon Sinek (2017) equated millennials' need for constant feedback to their need to receive validation based on the number of "likes" and comments they receive when posting something on social media. Sinek noted that prior generations sought the approval only of their parents, but millennials must now have the approval of their

parents, peers, and managers and supervisors (Crossman, 2016). Social media provides

instant gratification; thus, millennials expect this same type of instant gratification in the

workplace. Deal and Levenson found that while 54% of millennials they examined

expressed a desire to receive developmental feedback at least monthly, only 23% said

they receive feedback that frequently.

To engage millennials, managers and supervisors should set clear expectations

and directions for work. They should also ensure that millennials are receiving feedback

on a regular basis. This does not imply extensive and formal feedback; millennials just

need acknowledgment that they are on the right track and moving in the right direction.

This will be equivalent to giving them a stamp of approval or a "like" on social media.

Job control. Millennials grew up in an era when they observed their parents

being dependent on the organizations they worked for and often taken advantage of

through working long hours, receiving relatively low pay, and obtaining substandard

retirement plans. Today's millennials feel more independent and in control of the job

choices they make and the tasks they perform (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Organizations

have a reputation for treating employees like a number and millennials are determined to

change those perceptions. They refuse to be a cog in the wheel; instead, millennials

choose jobs in which they feel they can add value and make meaningful contributions to

their organizations. They accept jobs that give them the latitude to choose how and

where work is done. As mentioned, they want coaching and guidance, which is different

from being told how to do their jobs; they want the flexibility to make those

determinations on their own. .

Job/task challenge. Job challenge refers to an individual's workload and his or her responsibility toward it. Job challenge has been described as work that is motivating, stimulating, and interesting as it creates the potential for an individual to accomplish and master difficult tasks and to grow and develop in the execution of their duties (Crawford et al., 2014).

Millennials want to be challenged to perform new tasks and job duties. They take positions that give them the opportunity to develop their technical expertise (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Millennials want to cross-train for other jobs around the organizations as this will give them additional challenges, experience, and job variety (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009).

Mission and vision. An organization's mission and vision statements are guiding principles that define an organization's purpose, who they are, and what they believe in. Mission and vision statements, especially in the public sector, provide transparency and basis for accountability to the citizens they serve. Mission and vision statements should always be articulated when hiring personnel as their success is often based on an alignment of personal and organizational goals.

A millennial's primary concern is finding meaning from her or his workplace, and if there is an incongruence of values, the relationship will not blossom. However, if a millennial feels a connection to the organization's mission and vision, it will provide a meaningful opportunity to engagement in her or his job and a reciprocal relationship with the organization.

Job resources and training. Studies conducted by Bakker and Leiter (2010) and Schaufeli and Salanova (2007) have shown that job resources, such as skill variety,

autonomy, training, and learning opportunities have been positively associated with engagement. Job resources are considered both intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivators. Intrinsically, job resources foster an employee's growth, learning, and development while extrinsically, job resources are pivotal in the fulfillment of work and organizational goals (Bakker & Leiter, 2010).

According to Peter Senge (1990), great organizations believe in collaborative learning and use it as a conduit to build and lead through trust and mutual respect. Training opportunities strongly influence employee engagement as they initially provide an individual with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful in his or her job duties. Training also provides a pathway for employee growth and fulfillment as individuals can take on a variety of opportunities that may have been challenging had training not been provided (Crawford et al., 2014). Training influences employee engagement, and it can be the conduit to an individual finding meaning and her or his personal work-role fit.

Millennials have a thirst for learning; thus, they seek any opportunity to have access to career training, development, and resources, which will enable them to improve their skills (Deal & Levenson, 2016). It is a millennial's belief that the organization should provide the time and resources necessary for an employee to effectively develop, and in return, he or she will reciprocate with work productivity and organizational commitment.

Perceptions of workplace safety. Kahn (1990) found that workplace safety (psychological safety) is promoted when there are supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships in the workplace. It is paramount that management create an environment

that is supportive and open versus one that instills fear and power and negative

consequences over its workforce. Safety in an organization involves the amount of care

and support employees perceive they receive from the organization. Researchers May et

al. (2004) discovered that a supervisor's support is directly linked to psychological safety

and engagement.

In Simon Sinek's book, *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and

Others Don't*, he proposed that leaders create a "circle of safety" (p. 23), which will

enable employees within an organization to feel safe from threats of feeling intimidation,

humiliation, isolation, rejection, and feelings of uselessness from anyone within or

outside the organization. The circle of safety is developed through creating relationships

built on shared values and a deep sense of empathy and trust (Sinek, 2017). This makes

it absolutely imperative that all levels of leadership and management within an

organization learn to build supporting and trusting relationships as they are primarily

responsible for an employee's engagement.

Rewards and recognition. Fredrick Herzberg (1968), the premier motivation

researcher, acknowledged that recognizing employees for their work performance has a

profound effect on their commitment to the organization. Herzberg alluded to the

reciprocal exchange relationship that takes place as he explained receiving a reward: "Do

this for me or the company, and in return, I will give you a reward, an incentive, more

status, a promotion, all the quid pro quos that exist in the industrial organization" (p. 54).

Rewards and recognition often refer to remuneration for services and benefits; however,

they also relate to the informal praise and appreciation one receives in response to his or

her work efforts.

It is Blau's (2008) position that when one party receives a reward from another party, it serves as an incentive to furnish inducements to maintain the flow of relationship. Saks (2006) agreed and confirmed that rewards are recognition that is positively related to engagement and serve as a basis for a reciprocal exchange relationship between the employee and the organization. Blau (2008) said a person is characterized as ungrateful when she or he does not reciprocate a favor or behavior. He noted that many individuals go above and beyond what is asked of them as they are extrinsically motivated by the potential of generating a reward for their efforts. The most basic reward is that of seeking public approval or recognition for one's efforts. Receiving genuine approval from those one regards as significant, highly valued, or who has an official position of power boosts their ego, strengthens the reciprocal relationship, and further encourages engagement (Blau, 2008).

Recognition is essential to public sector workers as they do not have the same ability to receive pay increases and bonuses as those in the private sector. Lavigna (2013) also alluded to the fact that recognizing employee contributions serves to counteract the negative stigma and connotations associated with public servants. According to surveys conducted by Ryan Jenkins (2017), handwritten notes and a simple "thank you" from all levels within an organization are the most meaningful means of recognition to millennials.

Millennials desire feedback on a regular basis, and as a result, they desire to receive rewards and recognition for their good work. In fact, 85% of millennials want to be rewarded when they exceed performance levels; 64% prefer to be recognized for a personal accomplishment rather than a team or group accomplishment (Dolin, 2015). A

millennial's preference is to receive some type of reward or recognition at least monthly

or quarterly, yet he or she will settle for at least annual recognition (Deal & Levenson,

2016). The highest reward and recognition of a millennial's ambition and hard work is to

feel empowered and have the ability to move up in her or his organization, and in time,

become the leaders (Deal & Levenson, 2016; Jenkins, 2017). Each time millennials

receive positive recognition, they continue to be motivated and engaged to work hard in

the attainment of their goal to be promoted. Recognizing an employee's contributions

and improved performance is vital to maintaining a positive relationship and improving

employee engagement at a minimal cost to the organization (Deal & Levenson, 2013;

Lavigna, 2013).

Consequences

Employee engagement is quickly becoming one of the most researched constructs

of this decade as evidenced by the figures in Table 1, and that is largely due to the

positive consequences it has for individuals and organizations. According to Jonathon

Halbesleben (2010), the area of employee engagement that has received the least amount

of attention is that of consequences. This is perhaps due to the existing literature that

acknowledges that engagement leads to positive and important outcomes. By definition,

employee engagement has been described as a positive and fulfilling experience

(Schaufeli et al., 2002), a passion for work (Truss et al., 2014; Wellins & Concelman,

2007), and a high motivational state (Colbert, Mount, Witt, Harter, & Barrick, 2004);

therefore, one would anticipate that any consequences associated with engagement would

also be positive. The consequences or actual engagement-related outputs that this study

briefly discusses include employee satisfaction, employee and career development,

organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and decreased employee turnover intention.

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has been defined as a "pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job and job experience" (Locke, 1976, p. 1304). Job satisfaction provides a source of fulfillment and contentment (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009). In Saks's (2006) testing of engagement antecedents and consequences, he found that job satisfaction was positively related to both individual and organizational engagement. Millennials judge their job satisfaction based on their experience at work. If millennials have a meaningful job and a pleasant experience, they feel satisfied. Moreover, when they feel satisfied, they are engaged in and contributing positively to the organization's mission and vision.

Employee and career development. Career development provides a mutual benefit to both the employee and the organization. According to a study performed by Ryan Jenkins (2017), millennials rate professional growth and career development as the number-one driver of employee engagement and retention. Millennials want to learn everything they can as they do not want to remain stagnate. Millennials feel rewarded and satisfied when they see tangible opportunities for growth and development. Professional growth and development are essential to engaging millennials. Unlike other cohorts, millennials are not willing to wait for a promotion. They want one now as they feel they are educated enough and with the training and career development they receive, they are anxious to begin immediately challenging themselves (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). In the public sector, developing an employee often means losing him or her to another organization under the public sector's umbrella. While the individual

organization may lose an employee they have spent time and money grooming, the benefit is that talent is still contained within the public sector umbrella.

Organizational commitment. Employee engagement has often been defined and confused with organizational commitment, which describes one's allegiance and psychological attachment toward their organization. Engagement is different as it entails an employee making discretionary efforts toward the attainment of organizational goals. An employee can be committed to an organization but not engaged, yet when employees are engaged with an organization's mission and vision, they are typically committed to the organization (Cesario & Chambel, 2017). This has been empirically tested with organizational commitment resulting in a positive relationship with engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a).

Another millennial myth is that they are not loyal or committed. Millennials are very committed to their organization. Over 50% of millennials studied by Deal and Levenson (2016) say they are emotionally attached, and over two thirds say they do not intend to leave their organizations. Millennials do not like changing jobs or organizations as they feel it is very disruptive to their lives; instead, a majority of them would prefer to remain with their organizations for the rest of their career as long as it provided them with a supportive environment in which to grow and develop (Deal & Levenson, 2016).

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). OCBs are those that are not directly related to the functioning of the organization yet provide a culture that is welcoming and engaging (Fehr et al., 2017). OCB can include good sportsmanship or the ability to be positive when faced with adversity, organizational loyalty, and compliance, civic virtue, and conveying a positive impression of the organization to others (Robinson

et al., 2004). OCB can create organizational effectiveness through a reciprocation of behaviors that enhance the notion of being in a supportive and caring environment.

Millennials are highly altruistic and want to work for an organization that is socially responsible. They also seek to volunteer their time and help their community. As millennials were growing up and participating in various organizations, they would often be required to perform community service. This act of service is their way of giving back; thus, they look for and welcome opportunities to be civically minded (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Millennials value organizations that visibly and tangibly give back to their communities, and this greatly increases their personal level of EE.

Turnover intention. Turnover intention is perhaps one of the premier reasons that organizations invest in learning why and how to engage their workforce. Grounded in empirical evidence, there are an abundance of studies that provide conclusive proof that employee engagement significantly reduces turnover intention (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002; Maslach et al., 2001; Saks, 2006; Shuck, Reio, & Rocco, 2011; Wollard & Shuck, 2016). The key to maintaining an organization's workforce is to engage its employees.

According to consultants BlessingWhite (2013), if employees were given the choice, 81% of engaged employees say they intend on remaining with their current organization. Millennials do not want to leave their organizations, and public servants are known for their long tenures with an organization. The problem is, only a small fraction of the workforce is engaged, and with the transformation of the workforce due to baby boomer retirements and millennials becoming majority stakeholders, leaders are at a critical juncture where they do not have the liberty to operate their organization as they

have in the past. All leaders, but especially those in the public sector, must act now to save their workforce and retain their future leaders, the millennials.

Public Sector

The public sector has been defined as governments and all publicly controlled or publicly funded agencies, enterprises, and other entities that deliver public programs, goods, or services (The Institute of Internal Auditors [IIA], 2011). There are four levels of public sector organization: (a) international, (b) national (The U.S. Federal Government), (c) regional (state governments), and (d) local governments. For the purposes of this study, the term public sector is used to describe all government entities; however, the population of participants consists only of local county government employees.

Public sector employees want to improve the lives of the citizens they serve, yet they are faced with the challenges of brief elected and appointed official tenures, budget cuts, staff reductions, and more work and job responsibilities with no additional pay or rewards. For these reasons, Robert Lavigna (2013) started his book *Engaging Government Employees* by saying that "this is not an easy time to be employed in the public sector" (p. 1). Nancy Pelosi (2016) noted that public service is a noble calling and one not for the faint of heart, especially in light of today's antigovernment sentiments from the public. The public wants and expects the government at all levels to solve some of society's most wicked problems. Citizens demand that the government fix the economy, create jobs to solve the unemployment rate, protect the public, eliminate poverty, provide better healthcare, and make the educational system safer and more effective to name a few. This is to be accomplished with tightening budgets, a shrinking

workforce, and a divided government and public citizens (Lavigna, 2013). As a result, Lavigna (2013) agreed that it is critically important that public sector leaders improve the level of employee engagement within their organizations in order to run an efficient and effective organization with knowledgeable and engaged public servants.

The theory of public service motivation is that public servants are altruistically motivated due to their genuine desire or calling to make a difference in the lives of the people they serve (Ertas, 2016). This is different from those in the private sector whose motivation is linked to financial gains and profits for their organizations. Approaches to engagement within the public sector are unique in the aspect that public servants tend to value intrinsic rewards over extrinsic rewards (Crewson, 1997; Newstrom, Reif, & Monczka, 1976; Perry & Wise, 1990). Bakker (2015) suggested that on a daily basis, public sector leaders make a conscious effort to monitor what job demands and job resources public servants have available to them in order to actively improve the level of EE.

Robert Lavigna, who leads an agency created specifically to study public sector employee engagement, conducted a national study in 2016 to assess the level of engagement in both the public and private sectors (CPS HR Institute for Public Sector Employee Engagement, 2017). Lavigna's study revealed that 44% of private sector employees are fully engaged compared to 38% of public sector employees (CPS HR Institute for Public Sector Employee Engagement, 2017). Within the public sector, local government employees have the highest level of fully engaged employees at 44%, followed by federal employees at 34%, and state employees at 29% (CPS HR Institute for Public Sector Employee Engagement, 2017).

Governmental Accountants

Within the public sector umbrella, almost every profession that is available in the private sector is represented. For example, government accountants are employed at all levels of government. A government accountant within the federal government is primarily responsible for the management and allocation of public funds to other federal, state, and local agencies. At the state and local levels, government accountants manage the use of local revenues to fund public services. There are reporting standards and compliance audits at all levels to ensure that government agencies are being good financial stewards of public funds. Due to increased transparency and changing reporting regulations, accountants remain in a perpetual state of training. The changes in the workforce with baby boomers leaving and millennials assuming vacant positions presents immediate challenges for public sector leaders.

Public sector millennial accountants have specialized knowledge and technical expertise that many millennials may not share. Accountants who are certified public accountants are required to keep their license active by performing 80 hours of continuing education every 2 years. This is in addition to receiving specialized training related to government accounting. Governmental standards change on a regular basis; thus, it is imperative that millennial accountants understand the new standards and how to execute them in their duties and financial reporting. Millennial accountants must also have specialized knowledge related to the accounting processes, timing, and the impacts their transactions may have on other departments. This is knowledge that a public sector millennial accountant may have that other millennials may not share or be required to have.

Therefore it is imperative that in order for organizations to maintain a steady workforce and to retain institutional knowledge and high levels of accuracy in financial reporting, organizations have to understand how to engage their accountants, especially the millennials. Engaged public sector employees have proven to lower absenteeism, improve employee performance that supports mission-critical outcomes, and foster a collaborative and innovative work environment (Bakker, 2015; Lavigna, 2013). This is what the accounting profession needs to maintain public trust with the citizens being served.

The County of Riverside

The County of Riverside was the focus of this study. Riverside County, California, is one of 58 counties in the state of California; it ranks as the fourth most populous county in California and the 11th most populous county in the United States. Riverside County is roughly the size of the state of New Jersey in total area and is larger than many states (County of Riverside, Auditor-Controller's Office [ACO], 2017). Riverside County accountants are responsible for the oversight of $5.2 billion in estimated fiscal year 2007/2018 revenues across hundreds of programs and the funding of approximately 24,559 authorized positions.

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Social Exchange Theory (SET)

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Historical Overview

SET, like employee engagement, has gained traction in the last decade. This may be due to the arsenal of literature that theorizes that there is a link from engagement to rewards. The basic premise of SET is that a reciprocal exchange relationship exists between at least two parties. Leading theorists have alternatively referred to SET as

exchange theory (Homans, 1961), choice theory, social choice theory, choice and exchange theory (Nye, 1978), rational choice theory (Heath, 1976), and a theory of interpersonal relations and group functioning (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) described social exchange theory as "the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behavior" (p. 874).

George C. Homans (1961) provided an initial introduction to social exchange theory until theorists John Thibaut, Harold H. Kelly, Richard Emerson, and Peter Blau continued the work and contributed to the body of SET literature. In 1959, Thibaut and Kelley published the first major book on SET titled *The Social Psychology of Groups,* in which he asserted that individuals make the choice of which behaviors and actions they choose to exchange. To date, the most highly regarded and quoted social exchange theorist is Peter Blau, who in 1964 first published *Exchange and Power in Social Life*. In 2008, this book was updated and is on its 12th printing. Each theorist shares a slightly different view of SET; however, collectively they agree that it involves some type of interaction that, in turn, generates a reciprocal obligation. The next section evaluates Homans's and Blau's perception of SET.

George C. Homans

A self-described methodological individualist, George C. Homans (1961) is credited with first investigating the exchange relationship. Homans viewed society as a system in which social interactions consisted of exchanges of tangible and intangible activity that the receiver perceived as either a reward or a cost. It was Homans's notion that what one party gives can be considered a cost, yet, in return, the other party will receive a benefit that may be more valuable than what they gave up (Homans, 1961).

This balancing of rewards and costs influences behaviors when responding to exchange transactions.

Based on Psychologist B. F. Skinner's propositions about pigeon behavior, Homans (1974) applied the following propositions to human interactions to determine how human behaviors influence social exchange transactions and human relationships:

1. *The success proposition.* "For all actions taken by persons, the more often a particular action of a person is rewarded, the more likely the person is to perform that action" (Homans, 1974, p. 16). This proposition implies that the more often an exchange relationship has taken place, the more probable there will be for future exchange transactions.

2. *The stimulus proposition.* Homans (1974) stated,

    If in the past the occurrence of a particular stimulus, or set of stimuli has been the occasion on which a person's action has been rewarded, then the more similar the present stimuli are to the past ones, the more likely the person is to perform the action, or some similar action, now. (p. 22)

    Exchange relationships become more probable when there is a reappearance of circumstances that enable the successful exchange transactions.

3. *The value proposition.* "The more valuable to a person is the result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action" (Homans, 1974, p. 25). Values can either take the form of positive rewards or negative results considered as punishment. This proposition is similar to the law of nature that implies that positive actions will be repeated while negative actions often cease.

4. *The deprivation-satiation proposition.* "The more often in the recent past a person has received a particular reward, the less valuable any further unit of that reward becomes for him" (Homans, 1974, p. 29). The more often a reward or benefit is received, the less value it begins to hold and the less likely an individual is to perform an action to receive the reward or benefit. Homans noted that individuals are rarely fully satisfied with money or status alone; therefore, it is critical to find alternative ways to satisfy and engage individuals.

5. *The rationality proposition.* "In choosing between alternative actions, a person will choose that one for which, as perceived by him at the time, the value, V, of the result, multiplied by the probability, p, of getting the result, is the greater" (Homans, 1974, p. 43). The implication is that individuals will choose the exchange relationship that they perceive to generate the greatest amount of success.

Homan's propositions support his claim that behavioral psychology is the key to understanding the general laws as they apply to human social behavior and the reciprocal exchange relationships and transactions that occur between parties (Emerson, 1976).

Peter M. Blau

Blau (2008) set out to understand how the reciprocal exchange process influenced one's social life. Blau first defined social exchange as the "voluntary actions of individuals who are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring" (p. 91). According to Blau, a social exchange relationship has two conditions: (a) Behavior must be aligned toward a goal that can only be achieved through interactions with other parties, and (b) the work that is being performed must be important to the achievement of specified goals.

SET posits that relationships are formed using a cost-benefit analysis and a comparison of alternatives. These alternatives are in the form of two types of relationships: economic and social. Blau (2008) defined economic exchange, as "one where the nature of the exchange is specified and the method used to assure that each party fulfills its obligations is the formal contract upon which the exchange is based" (p. 95). Social exchange, in contrast, entails elements of intrinsic significance and involves favors that create future unspecified obligations. These types of arrangements take a great deal of time to develop and often rely on trust to discharge those future obligations. Economic exchanges are usually time limited whereas social exchanges are ongoing and indefinite. Social exchange relationships generate feelings of personal obligation, trust, and gratitude while purely economic exchange relationships are void of these feelings (Blau, 2008). Economic exchange relationships exist with specific terms and amounts. These relationships serve as a psychological contract where there exists mutual exchanges and expectations between the employee and the employer (Blau, 2008).

It has been noted that the satisfaction that each party to an exchange relationship enjoys is incumbent on the expectations they bring as well as the actual benefits they each intend to receive (Blau, 2008). If one party's expectations are high, they may be more disappointed by the exchange than the other party who had lower expectations from the relationship. When one party finds gratification in performing a task or service and the other party is subsequently gratified with the received action, an exchange takes place. This exchange of services includes the added benefit of a social reward that does not come at a cost to either party (Blau, 2008). These costless yet priceless rewards can be as simple as providing support, giving advice, or just providing a listening ear that

serves to build trust, respect, appreciation, and most importantly, engagement. Conversely, when there is a failure to reciprocate an exchange, there is a loss of credit, or trust, it creates a decline in the social relationship, it may cause one to disengage, and ultimately, there may be an exclusion from future exchanges. One's reputation could be affected when he or she is characterized as not honoring his or her obligations during an exchange of benefits (Blau, 2008).

Blau (2008) discussed three types of expectations that have an impact on the exchange relationship. The first type is "general expectations," which is the amount of overall benefits and rewards an individual expects to achieve throughout his social life (Blau, 2008, p. 145). This includes one's career and the potential benefits, income, and advancement the person hopes to achieve. General expectations are what most individuals would view as consistent achievements and failures based on the prevailing values and social standards at that time (Blau, 2008). Blau's research proved that when individuals successfully attain their desired level of aspiration in the performance of their tasks, they then raise the aspiration level even further, and conversely, when they fail to attain their level of aspiration, they lower it (Blau, 2008).

The second type of expectation is "particular expectation," which describes the expectations for an exchange of rewards and benefits that one party places on another party (Blau, 2008, p. 146). There is typically an early assessment to determine the degree to which a party can anticipate the other party meeting their expectations and conforming to the standards of the exchange relationship. The strength of the early assessment governs whether there will be a difference between assigning an individual a general expectation or a particular expectation (Blau, 2008). The final type of expectation is

"comparative expectation" or when one expects that the rewards they will receive will exceed the cost they contributed to the exchange relationship (Blau, 2008, p. 146).

A comparative expectation generates an unspoken analysis of ratios to calculate how profitable the exchange relationship will be. One party is assessing the value of the rewards and benefits that are available in comparison with the costs to obtain them. These expectations differ from "particular expectations" in that particular expectations depend on one's assessment of the other party's ability and willingness to provide rewards and benefits while comparative expectations assign a common standard to all parties and make comparisons to determine which relationship is more beneficial (Blau, 2008, p. 147). The more beneficial the relationship, the more committed to the exchange relationship the observing party will be.

Both particular and comparative expectations can modify an individual's level of general expectation and the amount of rewards and benefits the individual perceives he or she will receive. Blau (2008) gave the example of a worker whose wages were raised from $100 to $120. The worker, he noted, may have been initially satisfied with $110; however, when there was a subsequent decrease of $10 in wages, the worker was then dissatisfied with only earning $110. In another example, an individual who expects an income of $10,000 is likely to feel more gratification from the initial $1,000 raise that enabled him or her to meet his or her $10,000 expectation then she or he will feel when receiving future raises. In this case, like many others, minimum expectations from an exchange relationship are defined by current levels of rewards and benefits. This can affect the level of satisfaction and engagement one currently feels regarding the exchange

relationship and the anticipation or expectation of future rewards and benefits (Blau, 2008).

These scenarios are also known as the economic principle of the ultimately diminishing marginal utility or the satisfaction principle. SET states that rewards and benefits never reach a point of being fully satisfied; instead, as more rewards and benefits are obtained, their significance gradually declines. This makes it imperative to find inducements other than rewards and benefits that cannot quantifiably decrease.

Applying SET to the employee/organizational relationship serves to strengthen it and allows the employee to focus on acting in ways that benefit the organization as she or he will be confident that she or he will be justly rewarded. Employees will not have to worry about the organization taking advantage of them and failing to reciprocate appropriately (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). Alan Saks (2006) performed one of the first empirical tests of employee engagement and proved that engagement could be understood in terms of SET. In order to be effective, the reciprocal relationship must be perceived as fair by both parties. A fair exchange promotes engagement while the perception of an unfair exploitation promotes disapproval and disengagement (Blau, 2008).

Norm of Reciprocity

In social relationships, there is a constant battle to ensure that there is a proper balance to maintain the norm of reciprocity. Blau (2008) described balance as staying out of debt in one's social relationship by exercising an equality between inputs and outputs. A constant state of equilibrium can be difficult to achieve and maintain; thus, reciprocity serves to reinforce and balance power in the exchange relationship (Blau,

2008). All parties to an exchange transaction must learn to abide by rules that govern the exchange, which are better known as the norms of reciprocity. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) described three types of reciprocity: (a) reciprocity as a transactional pattern of interdependent exchanges, (b) reciprocity as a folk belief, and (c) reciprocity as a moral norm.

Reciprocity as a transactional pattern of interdependent exchanges is best understood as one of the three viewpoints held that parties to an exchange relationship can be based either solely on one's independent efforts or dependent completely on another party's efforts or interdependently as a combination of one's own efforts and the other party's efforts (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Interdependence involves a mutual reciprocation where when one party performs a service or supplies a benefit, the other party reciprocates the exchange.

Father of Social Anthropology Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski described reciprocity as folk belief or the notion that, in the end, there will eventually be a fair balance or exchange of goods and services (Gouldner, 1960). A view shared solely by Malinowski posits that reciprocity involves an exchange of equivalent services. Over time, he stated, exchange transactions will have a balance of input and outputs. While there are some exchange transactions that are not fair and balanced, in the end, all exchange transactions reach an equitable balance (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Homans was careful to assert that exchange transactions should be "roughly equivalent" being optimistic and noting that an equal balance is often difficult to not only measure but also to achieve (Gouldner, 1960). It was also Malinowski's harsh position that when

individuals choose not to reciprocate an exchange transaction, they will face penalties (Gouldner, 1960).

Finally, reciprocity is a moral norm, which describes a cultural mandate to ensure that there is universal reciprocation and compliance even though not all individuals will reciprocate at the same level. Researchers Robert Eisenberger, Patrick Lynch, Justin Aselage, and Stephanie Rohdieck (2004) argued that reciprocity can be both positive and negative. Negative exchanges are reciprocated with additional negative exchanges while positive exchanges are typically reciprocated with positive treatments (Eisenberger et al., 2004).

Blau (2008) and Gouldner (1960) both agreed on the norm of reciprocity, but they disagreed on the motives for the reciprocation. Gouldner said the reciprocity norm is the starting mechanism in the development of interpersonal relationships. His position is that individuals are helpful to others due to the expectation that the favorable treatment will be reciprocated. Blau (2008) subscribed to the norm of reciprocity; however, he believed that once an exchange relationship has been established, individuals will reciprocate based on the value placed on the relationship rather than as simply an expectation to reciprocate (Blau, 2008).

According to Alvin Gouldner (1960), the norm of reciprocity makes two universal minimal demands: (a) if one party has been helped or benefits in any way by another party, there should be a reciprocal exchange of services or benefits; and (b) parties should not injure those who have helped them (Gouldner, 1960). These principles are often applied in the workplace; thus, SET has been used to understand the importance of workplace relationships. SET and reciprocity have been shown to produce better results

than relationships that are based on or rely heavily on negotiation factors and techniques. Reciprocity builds better work relationships that provide a sense of motivation, are long term, and are built on mutual trust and commitment (Molm, Peterson, & Takahashi, 2001). Positive exchange relationships grow and evolve as employees perform their tasks and duties and, in return, perceive that their employer genuinely cares about and actively protects their best interests.

Summary

Employee engagement is a construct that, within the last decade, has become one of the most researched behavioral phenomenons. A universal definition of employee engagement continues to elude both scholars and practitioners. Employee engagement has been described as a positive, fulfilling, highly motivational, and rewarding reciprocal exchange relationship between an employee and his or her organization. There is very little debate as to the positive consequences or benefits of employee engagement, yet only a small percentage of the workforce is actively engaged. What researchers have been trying to determine is what influences engagement.

The workforce is going through a transformation as baby boomers are retiring in record numbers and millennials are entering the workforce and filling a large number of these vacancies. Millennials are projected to be majority stakeholders in the workforce within the next 2 years. Millennials have been the most studied and analyzed cohort of all times. Millennials have the same drives and ambition for success as the other cohorts, but the path by which they perceive to achieve it is quite different.

There are many myths surrounding millennials that need to be dispelled. The facts are that millennials are hardworking and have a strong desire to contribute. They

want to work for an organization that aligns with their personal values and beliefs. They want meaningful work, not routine tasks. They want work-life balance, but they will work long hours collaboratively with team members to meet their goals and project deadlines. Millennials work to live not live to work. They want work to feel like a rewarding experience. A millennial's compensation package may provide the initial attraction to his/her organization, but paying him/her more will not fully satisfy him/her. Millennials are highly intrinsically motivated and want to feel valued and cared about within their organization. Millennials want to feel a level of autonomy and control while performing their tasks; however, they need constant feedback. Millennials will remain committed to their organizations when they feel engaged and are learning, developing, and growing professionally.

Public servants, for different reasons than millennials, are also more intrinsically motivated. This is mainly due to a public servant's altruistic nature and public service motivation. For these reason, both millennials and public servants are motivated differently. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify how millennials define employee engagement and gain a better understanding of the antecedents that public sector millennials perceive to influence employee engagement in the workplace through their lived experiences. The theoretical basis for this study was Saks's (2006) proven SET. Saks's study makes the indisputable case that when employees perceive that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being, they are more likely to reciprocate with greater levels of engagement in their job and the organization (Saks, 2006).

Robert Lavigna (2013) alluded to the fact that engaged employees are made, not born. It is incumbent upon all leaders, especially those in the public sector, to determine the antecedents that will lead employees to the path of engagement. Engaged employees enjoy a high-quality relationship with their organizations, which leads to having more positive attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. Engaged employees will support the mission and vision of the organization. Engagement is the key to both the employee's and the organization's success.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Employee engagement (EE) is a relatively new construct that has not been universally defined. Theorists have proposed that EE is a harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles (Kahn, 1990), a positive, fulfilling state of mind (Schaufeli et al., 2002), a highly motivational state of mind, and a rewarding reciprocal exchange relationship. EE has also been described as energy, involvement, efficacy, vigor, absorption, flow, dedication, passion, and so forth. With each description, a number of antecedents have been proposed on how to achieve or influence engagement. Antecedents are the constructs, strategies, or conditions that precede the development of EE and that come before an organization or manager reaps the benefits of engagement-related outputs (e.g., better customer service, higher levels of productivity, lower absenteeism, lower levels of turnover; Fu, 2016; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). While a universal definition and set of antecedents continue to elude both researchers and practitioners, what they do globally agree on is that engaged employees will support the organization's mission, they are more satisfied with their jobs, they have positive attitudes and behaviors, they are more committed to their organizations, and they have no intention of leaving (Kaur, 2017; Saks, 2006; Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

The purpose of this study was to identify how local county government millennial accountants define EE and to discover what antecedents they perceive to influence engagement in the workplace through their lived experiences. Social exchange theory (SET) undergirds this study as it proposes that both the employee and organizations can benefit from engaging in a mutually beneficial and rewarding reciprocal exchange relationship (Saks, 2006). The results of this study will contribute to the literature and

contemporary research by exploring EE in the realm of public sector local government and proposing which antecedents have the greatest influence millennials and impact to the organizations in which they serve. It is the belief that this research, although conducted on a local government level, can be applied throughout the entire public sector governmental umbrella.

In 2016, with 79.8 million millennials in the United States, the U.S. Census Bureau projected that millennials were the largest living generation by population size (Montes, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2017). By the year 2020, millennials will be the majority cohort in the workplace, and in 2025, millennials will make up 75% of the workforce (Espinoza & Ukleja, 2016; Kuhl, 2014; Montes, 2017; Schawbel, n.d.). Research has shown that, for varying reasons, both public servants and millennials are more intrinsically motivated; thus, it is incumbent upon leaders, especially those in the public sector, to understand how to engage the cohort of millennials that will be taking over the workforce in the very near future (Crewson, 1997; Deal & Levenson, 2016, Newstrom et al., 1976; Perry & Wise, 1990).

A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized as it is most effective in understanding the perceptions and perspectives of a particular situation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Vagle (2016) asserted that a phenomenological study examines the intentional relationships that manifest between people who are connected in some way. There are three generational cohorts in today's workforce. Baby boomer employees are retiring in mass numbers, Generation Xers are rapidly approaching retirement age, and millennials are taking over and transforming the workplace (McClellan & Holden, 2001). Millennials have unique qualities that prohibit leaders from managing and interacting

with them in the same manner as the other generational cohorts (Liesem, 2017). One advantage to public sector leaders is that both public servants and millennials highly value and prefer to receive intrinsic rewards such as meaningful work, job variety, and opportunities for additional training and professional development. A phenomenological study has the ability to segregate this population of local county government millennials to determine precisely their lived experiences and those influences that will lead to increased levels of EE.

Presented in Chapter 2 was an extensive review of historical and current literature on EE and its antecedents, the millennial generational cohort, the public sector, and SET. This chapter describes the design and methodology that were employed in the study. Details are provided regarding the target population and selection criteria for the participants, the research and interview questions, the methods used in the data collection process, the analysis of data, and the ethical considerations that were implemented to protect the rights of the participants. This chapter also provides a reference to the documents that provided the approval for the study and those documents that participants signed giving informed consent to participate in the study.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to identify how local county governmental millennial accountants define EE and to discover what antecedents they perceive to influence engagement in the workplace through their lived experiences. The specific aim of the study was to discover what antecedents would engage public sector millennials. Once antecedents were identified, public sector leaders would have the knowledge necessary to engage their workforce. Engagement would allow for the

opportunity to create a reciprocal exchange relationship that would be beneficial and rewarding to both the employee and the organization.

Research Questions

Millennial employees are the fastest growing generation in the workforce. Millennials are uncharacteristically different from the generational cohorts of baby boomers and Generation Xers (Gallup, 2017). Baby boomers are known to be workaholics, and millennials work hard but want more work-life balance (WLB). Millennials require instant gratification, and they need feedback on a regular basis. Millennials are well educated, and as soon as a promotional opportunity arises, they want it immediately rather than working their way up the ladder as previous cohorts have done (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Due to the millennial's unique qualities, it is paramount that public sector leaders do not apply the same approach to interacting and engaging with millennials as they do with other cohorts. To reap the benefits of sustained EE, such as increased job satisfaction, the retention of institutional knowledge through lower turnover, and increased career development and organizational commitment, public sector leaders have to understand a millennial's path to engagement. The following three research questions sought to develop a deeper understanding of millennial EE and its antecedents.

Research Question 1: How do millennial public sector accountants define employee engagement?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions, lived experiences, descriptions, and understandings of employee engagement among millennial public sector accountants?

Research Question 3: What antecedents do millennial public sector accountants perceive as having the greatest influence on employee engagement?

Research Design and Approach

To address the research questions on the understanding and experiences of millennials and EE, a qualitative phenomenological design method was selected for this study. Qualitative research allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of a specific construct from the study participant's point of view (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). This study examined the lived experience of public sector millennial accountants and their definition and perceptions of EE. The qualitative data collection process was conducted using semistructured interview questions. Each participant was asked the same 17 open-ended questions. The interview was in a semistructured format to enable the researcher during the interviews to ask follow-up questions and probes to clarify a response or provide further understanding to the participant.

Appropriateness of Design

Qualitative and quantitative research design methods have distinctively different approaches. Quantitative research involves the testing of theories by examining the relationship among variables (Creswell, 2014). Research is most commonly conducted through the use of surveys, experiments, and existing statistics to explore relationships, describe trends, attitudes, and opinions or to predict results for given variables to answer research questions (Neuman, 2016). Quantitative researchers have been described as detached because their data are in the form of numbers from measurements that test hypotheses and variables using statistical procedures (Neuman, 2016). Quantitative studies emphasize producing precise and objective statistical findings that can frequently

be replicated (Neuman, 2016). This research project sought to understand a public sector millennial's personal experience with EE, which cannot be quantified numerically. Thus a quantitative approach for this study would not be appropriate.

Qualitative researchers collect data to explore and understand a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research has been characterized as an interpretative paradigm, which emphasizes subjective experiences and the meanings they have for an individual (Starman, 2013). Whereas quantitative researchers are detached, qualitative researchers are directly involved and focused on an interactive process to seek answers. Data collection is typically in the form of words and images from documents, observations, and transcripts. This research project employed a qualitative approach, as the EE of millennials in a public sector organization is both a social and human issue that needs further exploration. Research data are in the form of words or responses from participants.

The data analysis process consisted of developing a general understanding of the data and constructing theories and themes about the central phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The process of discovering theories and themes is commonly known as data mining. This process consists of taking the full set of extracted data (interview responses) and combining it into a complete data set. The researcher then categorizes and interprets the data set with the goal of building upon or forming a theoretical basis to support or oppose stated research questions (Neuman, 2016). To perform a qualitative study, the researcher must choose from one of the five qualitative design methods: ethnography, narrative research, grounded theory, case studies, and phenomenological research.

A phenomenological research design method is appropriate when seeking to understand an individual's lived experiences and perceptions of reality for a more in-depth understanding of phenomena (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Moustakas (1994) noted that a participant's voice is extremely significant to a phenomenological design when recounting lived experiences. The qualitative phenomenological design methodology is effectively able to recognize the significance of a participant's thoughts and feelings by asking robust open-ended questions. The detailed responses collected throughout the interview process are essential when examining a construct in which there is very little empirical evidence (Moustakas, 1994).

This research project gives millennials an opportunity to articulate what they feel and think rather than how they are perceived. Millennials were able to inform the researcher about what support, tools and resources they need and require to become engaged in the workforce. Giving millennials a voice provided the researcher with groundbreaking knowledge that can have a direct impact on public sector organizations.

A phenomenological design approach was the most appropriate as this study intended to describe and interpret rather than to measure and predict, not necessarily to suggest a cause-and-effect relationship between variables but to understand the phenomenon of millennial EE in a detailed manner (Leedy, 1997). This method gives millennials a voice and allows the researcher to gain essential insights into the lived experiences of public sector millennials.

Phenomenological Research Design

Once phenomenology was chosen as the research design methodology, the researcher then had to determine which phenomenological research paradigm would be

most appropriate. There are two schools of thought as it pertains to phenomenology: the husserlian approach or the hermeneutic approach (Moustakas, 1994).

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel officially defined phenomenology in 1807 as "the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Phenomenology quickly gained popularity and became a 20th-century philosophical movement due in great part to the advanced research efforts of mathematician Edmund Husserl and his student, philosopher Martin Heidegger (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl redefined phenomenology, and his husserlian phenomenological approach became commonly known as transcendental or descriptive phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). It was his position that all knowledge should be based on absolutely certain insights. Husserl is also credited with using bracketing (or epoché) to explain a phenomenon (Giorgi, 2007). Husserl used the term *bracketing* to coincide with a mathematical equation. He implied that what is done within the brackets of research is separate from what is taking place outside the brackets (Van Manen, 2014). Bracketing therefore allows for the validation of the data collection and analysis process by putting aside preconceived beliefs, values, personal knowledge, and experiences to accurately describe a study participant's life experiences (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Husserl's approach was for the researcher to remain unbiased and not add any interpretation to the understanding of the experience (Dowling, 2007). A researcher must refrain from using judgment and should only see an experience for what it actually is (Chan et al., 2013; Dowling, 2007). As a local government public sector accountant with millennial

children, I bracketed my experiences within the public sector, those of being an accountant and a mother of millennials, and set them aside as I perform this study.

Husserl's student Martin Heidegger took an alternate approach from his former teacher. Heidegger's view of phenomenology was described as hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology, which focused on subjective experiences of individuals and groups (Kafle, 2011; Vagle, 2016). In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher aims to focus on a participant's consciousness while understanding his or her human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Heidegger also placed significant emphasis on bracketing or epoché, even suggesting that it is a technique that should be applied when studying the lived experiences of a subject (Van Manen, 2014). The process of bracketing a phenomenon is to give total meaning to a construct through a group of experiences rather than through a single perspective (Kafle, 2011).

According to Tufford and Newman (2010), one method of bracketing is "engaging in interviews with an outside source to uncover and bring into awareness preconceptions and biases" (p. 86). I served as the outside source who interviewed millennial public sector accountants on their perceptions of EE; however, I bracketed my experience as an accountant and my personal experiences of EE. Bracketing interviews can provide clarity for a researcher in the understanding of the phenomena being studied.

For this research project, the hermeneutic approach was most appropriate as it is an interpretive process aimed at discovering meaning and understanding of human phenomena. There are many prejudgments and myths regarding a millennial's attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. Hermeneutics allowed the researcher to move beyond a participant's words and interpret his or her experiences. This process enabled the

researcher to confirm or dispel millennials' myths and then reshape how millennials are viewed in the workplace. Hermeneutics requires that researchers layer a theoretical foundation upon the interpretation of data (Cunliffe, 2003; Van Manen, 2014). This research project was based on SET as the foundation for understanding the engagement relationship between public sector millennials and their organization. The study of *Employee Engagement: The Path to Understanding Public Sector Silent Heroes— Millennial Accountants* was deployed using a qualitative phenomenological approach grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology, which gave millennials a voice and allowed the researcher to interpret their meaning and experiences based on the social exchange theoretical foundation.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is to identify and implement a methodology and design to provide valid and reliable data for addressing the research questions. The intent is not to build consensus but to understand the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This study involved identifying shared experiences among public sector millennials regarding the construct of EE. The role of the researcher was to introduce the study to the selected participants and answer any questions the participants may have had regarding the planned research. The researcher served as the principal investigator in the collection of data from the participants. A standard set of 17 open-ended interview questions was prepared in advance and were asked of each participant. Participants shared their perceptions and definitions of EE and the antecedents they perceived to influence EE. A previous study served as the basis for the interview questions (Wollard & Shuck, 2011). While the interview questions were not exhaustive of every antecedent

mentioned in the literature, they did capture those antecedents that were most applicable to a public sector environment and to millennials.

Participants and Population

In a phenomenological study, it is imperative that individuals who have experience with the phenomenon being studied are those selected to be participants. Since the purpose of the study was to define EE and the antecedents that lead to engagement by the millennial cohort, all other generational cohorts were excluded from the participant selection process. Millennials are defined as those individuals born between 1981 and 2000 (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Participants were comprised of accountants from the County of Riverside who were between the ages of 19 and 36 years of age as of December 31, 2017. The end of the calendar year was chosen as a cutoff date because it ensured that all potential participants were over the age of 18.

As of October 31, 2017, the County of Riverside had a total of 19,644 full-time employees of which roughly 35% or 6,796 were millennials. Based on data shown in Table 3, as of February 1, 2018, the County of Riverside had 726 employees in an accounting series position. Of the 726 employees, baby boomers, who were once the majority, now represent only 16% of the population. Generation X employees are currently the majority at 57%, and millennials make up 27% of County of Riverside accountants. The millennial group of accountants made up the target population of potential study participants for this research project. Figure 2 presents the list of accounting series positions from which participants were solicited. Within the accounting series, there are those positions that require a degree and are considered professional accountants and those that do not require a degree and are referred to as

paraprofessionals. The participant population consisted of a combination of millennials

from both professional and paraprofessional level positions.

Table 3

Breakdown of Generations in County of Riverside Accounting Positions

Accountants	Positions	%
Baby boomer	119	16%
Generation X	411	57%
Millennial	196	27%
Grand total	726	100%

Job Code	HR Job Title	Job Code	HR Job Title
15911	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT I	77418	SYSTEMS ACCOUNTANT I
15912	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT II	77419	SYSTEMS ACCOUNTANT II
15913	SR ACCOUNTING ASST	77421	SR INTERNAL AUDITOR
15915	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I	77422	ACCOUNTANT II - PARKS
15916	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN II	77425	ASST COUNTY AUDITOR-CONTROLLER
15917	SUPV ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN	77426	DEP AUDITOR-CONTROLLER
15919	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I - CN	77428	RCA SUPERVISING ACCOUNTANT
15927	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN II - C	77434	DEP TREASURER/TAX COLLECTOR
15933	ACCOUNTING ASST I - CN	77435	ASST TREASURER/TAX COLLECTOR
15937	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN II - CN	77438	CHF DEP TREASURER-TAX COLL
74112	ASSOC MANAGEMENT ANALYST	77438	SR CHF DEP TREASURER-TAX COLL
74120	MANAGEMENT ANALYST	77441	AUDITOR/APPRAISER I
74134	PRINCIPAL MGMT ANALYST	77442	AUDITOR/APPRAISER II
74150	SR MANAGEMENT ANALYST	77443	SR AUDITOR/APPRAISER
74211	HOSPITAL BUDGET REIMBURSE OFCR	77444	SUPV AUDITOR-APPRAISER
74532	TREASURER & TAX COLLECTOR	77490	CHF FINANCE OFFICER, DPSS
74608	INTERNAL AUDIT & COMP MGR	77497	FISCAL ANALYST
75212	COUNTY AUDITOR-CONTROLLER	77499	FISCAL MANAGER
77409	BUDGET/REIMBURSEMENT ANALYST	77500	FISCAL ANALYST - TTC
77410	ACCOUNTANT TRAINEE	77620	EO PRINCIPAL BUDGET ANALYST
77411	ACCOUNTANT I	80070	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT II - WRMD
77412	ACCOUNTANT II	80071	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I - WRMD
77413	SR ACCOUNTANT	85001	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT II-PARKS
77414	PRINCIPAL ACCOUNTANT	85002	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I -PARKS
77415	CHF ACCOUNTANT	85080	SUPV ACCOUNTANT - PARKS
77416	SUPV ACCOUNTANT	85081	FISCAL MANAGER - PARKS
		92740	D.A. FORENSIC ACCOUNTANT

Figure 2. Accounting series positions from which participants were solicited. Adapted
from RIVCO HR, n.d., County of Riverside (http://rc-hr.com/Find-A-Job/Job-Searching/Job-
Descriptions).

The researcher obtained a listing of employees who occupied the positions shown in Figure 2 from a public information request. According to the California Constitution, Article I, Section 3, subdivision (b), and the California Public Records Act, California Government Code Section 6250, any public citizen may have access to personnel information that has already been provided to a government agency by a government employee, which does not violate an individual's privacy (Inspection of Public Records, 1943/1998).

The County of Riverside Assistant Auditor-Controller signed the research agreement (Appendix G) giving the researcher permission to use the names from the public information request to recruit participants for this study. The names of the employees and their organizations were not disclosed in this study. The researcher was prohibited from recruiting participants from the ACO's (where the researcher is employed) to eliminate any concerns of coercion or undue influence.

Potential research participants had to be permanent County of Riverside employees who were between the ages of 19 and 36 years of age, had passed their initial probationary period, were in an accounting series position, and did not work in the Riverside County Auditor-Controller's Office (ACO). For this research, it was desirable to have each age range represented. It was the intent of the researcher to interview all millennials who agreed to participate. The goal was to have at least 24 participants; however, a minimum of 12 participants was enough to reasonably ensure data saturation, according to researchers Greg Guest et al. (2006). Their research has shown that on average, after 12 interviews, very few new themes emerge (Englander, 2012; Guest et al.,

2006). When no new themes emerge or additional data do not lead to more information,

what is known as data saturation, has been reached (Creswell, 2014; Englander, 2012).

All millennials identified in the target population received an e-mail from the

researcher's California Baptist University (CBU) account. This was a group e-mail in

which all potential participants were blind copied. This ensured the privacy of all

prospective participants. The body of the e-mail was an informational flyer (as shown in

Appendix B) and contained general information regarding the study. The e-mail

referenced a set of attachments that were included with the e-mail. The attachments

included a formal letter of introduction (Appendix C), the participant informed consent

(Appendix D), which also gave consent to audiotape the interview, the confidentiality

statement (Appendix E), and finally, the Research Participants Bill of Rights (Appendix

F). Once a millennial chose to participate, he or she was to digitally sign and e-mail the

informed consent agreement back to the researcher's CBU account.

Potential participants had up to 7 days to respond to the initial e-mail before a

follow-up e-mail was sent out. After the follow-up e-mail was sent, the researcher waited

another 7 days to see if additional participants agreed to participate. If the researcher had

yet to reach a minimum of 12 potential participants, a third e-mail was sent urging

participants to participate and letting them know that they would receive a $10 Starbucks

gift card as an incentive to participate. After a third attempt to find participants, the

researcher proceeded with those who had already committed to the study.

Participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and selected participants agreed

to share their perceptions as they responded to 17 open-ended interview questions.

Volunteering to participate in the study was an opportunity to provide understanding that

may contribute to shaping the future attitudes and behaviors of public sector leaders concerning millennials and EE. The millennials who agreed to participate were given a $10 Starbucks gift card as appreciation for their time spent being interviewed. Participants had the option to decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without fear of consequences.

Data Collection

It is common in quantitative research projects to use instruments such as SurveyMonkey (https.www.surveymonkey.com) to measure specific variables and collect data. However, qualitative researchers have no specific predetermined instruments. Instead, the researcher becomes the key instrument in the collection of data (Creswell, 2014). To gain an understanding of the lived experiences of public sector millennials, this research project utilized a semistructured interview process with 17 open-ended questions.

The interview questions were intended to be nonthreatening (Moustakas, 1994). The semistructured format enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions and probes to clarify a response or provide further understanding to the participant. An open-ended question cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no"; thus, it enabled participants to provide meaningful, well-thought-out responses to the questions asked. According to Seidman (2013), interviews are at the root of understanding the lived experience of other people and a way to offer meaning to their experiences. Through this interview process, millennial participants were able to vocalize and tell their experience from their own point of view.

The researcher contacted all participants who returned their digitally signed informed consent. A designated date and time was set up to conduct the interview. The researcher was available to conduct interviews after 6 p.m. on Monday through Thursday and all day on Friday through Sunday based on a participant's availability. The goal was to conduct all interviews within a 30-day timeframe. All interviews were performed using GoToMeeting. Once a firm date and time was established, the researcher e-mailed the participant a meeting request, which contained the link and access code for the participant to use when joining the meeting. Interviews were conducted within a 90-minute timeframe. GoToMeeting allows participants to instantly join a scheduled meeting (no download required) from any desktop or mobile device by selecting the provided link. Participants were able to use the free mobile app to start the scheduled meeting from any iPhone, iPad, Android device, or Windows mobile device. They also had the ability to dial in from any landline phone and connect to GoToMeeting using the access code in their invitation.

The researcher was always online at least 10 minutes before the start of the scheduled meeting. Once the designated meeting time arrived, if the participant was not on the line, the researcher e-mailed the recipient to ensure that he or she was still willing to participate. The researcher remained on the line for at least 20 minutes after the start of the meeting in the event the participant was running late. If after 20 minutes the participant had not joined the meeting and had not contacted the researcher, the researcher sent an e-mail to the participant asking for a follow-up meeting.

If there was no delay in participants joining the scheduled meeting, the researcher started by greeting the participant and thanking her or him for her or his time. The

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researcher informed the participant that at the conclusion of the call, they would receive a

$10 Starbucks gift card as a token of the researcher's appreciation. The researcher

reminded the participant of her or his consent to audiotape the GoToMeeting and let them

know that the meeting was then being recorded.

The interview process began by asking participants to describe themselves, the

length of time they have worked at the County of Riverside, and what positions they have

held since working in the county. These conversational questions allowed the researcher

to flow into a list of semistructured questions. It was the intent of the researcher to

appear as if the interview was informal to engage the participant and encourage him or

her to speak freely. The researcher verified that the participant met the criteria outlined

in the study. The participant had to be in an accounting series position, have been with

the County of Riverside for at least 1 year in a permanent full-time position, and be

between the ages of 19 and 36 years of age.

Once all the participant criteria were verified, the researcher went through the

interview script (Appendix I). There was a more formal introduction before the

researcher briefly explained the background and purpose of the study. The researcher

discussed the ground rules then asked the participant whether she or he had any questions

before beginning the interview questions. The researcher asked the participant each of

the questions and gave them adequate time to reflect and give a meaningful and well-

thought-out response. During the interviews, clarifying questions and probes were asked

to clarify a response or provide further understanding to the participant. The researcher

engaged in active listening and note taking throughout the interview to capture the true

essence of the phenomena being studied (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). At the conclusion of

the interview questions, the researcher debriefed the participants and again thanked them for their participation.

The recorded meeting was immediately downloaded to the researcher's computer and saved as a password-protected MP4 file using an alphanumeric code and the date of the interview as the file name. The researcher then e-mailed the participants their $10 Starbucks gift card thanking them for the time and contribution to the research project.

The MP4 data files from the audiotaped interviews were uploaded to TranscribeMe (a professional transcription service) and transcribed within 72 hours of the interview to keep perceptions, memos, and observations fresh in mind. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis. An alphanumeric coding system was assigned to each participant and was referenced on the interview transcription (i.e., MEE01 was assigned to the first employee participant; MEE02 was assigned to the second employee participant, etc.). The researcher performed due diligence by reviewing all interviews and comparing them to the MP4 file for accuracy and completeness. Once the transcripts had been reviewed for accuracy, the process of analyzing and interpreting the data in NVivo began.

Interview Questions

The following are the interview questions that served as the basis for collecting data to support and provide insight into the research questions. Seventeen open-ended questions were asked to probe the lived experiences of millennial participants and to support the theoretical rationales proposed. To facilitate uniformity, an interview protocol and script (Appendix I) were administered to each participant to ensure a level of consistency throughout the process. Each interview was allotted 90 minutes to

complete. Seidman (2013) noted that a 90-minute format is optimum as an hour-long interview tends to invite participants to "watch the clock" and 2 hours appears too long as participants start to lose focus. As a result, a 90-minute interview format appears to be the most appropriate amount of time that participants can reconstruct their experience, put it in the context of their lives, and then reflect on its meaning adequately (Seidman, 2013). The researcher alerted the participant when there were 30 minutes remaining and again when there were 15 minutes remaining in the interview session. The researcher employed every effort not to go beyond the 90-minute time frame unless the participant verbally agreed to do so. The interview questions were as follows:

1. How do you define employee engagement?

2. What is your experience being engaged? Please explain.

3. What factors do you perceive to influence your personal level of engagement?

4. What can your organization do to influence your level of engagement?

5. What does having meaningful work mean to you?

6. What does having work/life balance mean to you?

7. What does being a "fit" in the role that you perform mean to you?

8. What does having your supervisor's support mean to you?

9. What does having your organization's support mean to you?

10. What does having choice and control over the tasks you perform mean to you?

11. What does receiving encouragement at work mean to you?

12. What does receiving timely feedback mean to you?

13. What does having opportunities for learning in your organization mean to you?

14. Describe if having a partnership of give and take with your organization contributes to your level of employee engagement? And why?

15. Describe what the impact of being fully engaged would have on your organization?

16. Are there any other factors that would have an influence on your level of employee engagement?

17. Is there anything else about employee engagement that you would like to add? (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Question 1 begins by exploring a participant's understanding of EE. Question 2 explores the participant's lived experience of being engaged. A participant's lived experience may illustrate examples of a reciprocal exchange relationship with his or her organization. Questions 3 and 4 sought to gauge what antecedents millennials deem meaningful enough to influence their level of engagement. Questions 5 through 13 allowed the researcher to evaluate how meaningful specific antecedents are to millennials and whether they influence their view of engagement. Questions 14 and 15 were asked to evaluate the tenants of the SET and determine whether millennials were perceived to value the reciprocal exchange relationship with their organization. Question 16 sought to understand what the most important element of EE is to millennials, and finally, Question 17 was added to enable participants to add any additional thoughts that may not have been explicitly solicited.

These questions were based loosely on Karen Kelly Wollard and Brad Shuck's (2011) article titled "Antecedents to Employee Engagement: A Structured Review of the Literature." This article breaks down antecedents leading to engagement into two categories: individual antecedents and organizational antecedents. These questions were

designed to see which antecedents were more meaningful to millennials. The researcher also sought to determine whether the millennial was perceived to have an exchange relationship with his or her organization that was characterized by a reciprocation of engagement for rewards, recognition, and benefits.

Data Analysis

To analyze data means to systematically organize, integrate, and examine data in search of themes, patterns, and relationships (Neuman, 2016). Data analysis allows the researcher to expand theory, improve understanding, and advance knowledge of a construct. The process of interpreting the data is to derive meaning by connecting data to concepts and identifying themes (Woolf & Silver, 2018). Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method of analysis served as the foundation for developing a description of millennial EE. Moustakas described the seven steps for analyzing qualitative data using the modified van Kaam data analysis process as follows:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping—horizonalization or the listing of every quote relevance to the experience as every statement has equal value.

2. Reduction and elimination—determining whether the experience is necessary and sufficient for understanding the phenomenon being studied and is it possible to abstract and label the experience.

3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents—determine the core themes of the phenomenon being studied.

4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application: validation—determine whether the themes are explicitly stated in participant transcripts.

5. Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, construct individual textural description for each participant of the experience by including verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.

6. Construct a textural-structural description for each participant of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes

7. Develop a composite description of the meanings and essences of the experiences as described by millennial accounting participants.

Using Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method aided in the exploration of themes important to the understanding of millennial EE. The analysis evolved into recurring themes, which discovered how millennials defined and perceived EE based on their lived experiences. Data coding took place in two phases. Phase 1 involved coding and importing the interview questions and responses into NVivo 12 Plus, and Phase 2 involved the utilization of Excel to further code participant responses into subcategories in order to identify reoccurring themes.

Data coding is an essential element when seeking to identify themes (Neuman, 2016). Themes were identified and organized into categories from codes assigned to selected words and phrases. NVivo 12 Pro software and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets were used to perform the data translation and coding of data into categories called nodes. Each category or node was coded to additional subcategories as themes emerged. NVivo (2018) can retrieve, process, and rearrange documents and audio data sources as necessary. NVivo software is robust enough to handle and evaluate a considerable amount of textual, illustrative, or auditory data for qualitative researchers to use in analyzing research.

Themes were built upon given definitions of EE, antecedents that were identified to influence engagement, and behaviors that were characteristic of the millennial cohort. Key themes were further analyzed and evaluated alongside constructs, supporting empirical research, and theoretical rationales to determine whether they support or oppose literature review research. Data were analyzed until a point of saturation had been reached. That point occurred when all concepts and themes were identified, all research questions had been answered, and no additional themes emerged (Neuman, 2016). It was the goal of the researcher to produce findings that could provide an opportunity for public sector leaders to gain new insights into what influences a millennial to engage, which, in turn, could foster and develop a beneficial reciprocal exchange relationship within public sector organizations.

Approvals

Before conducting the study, consent was obtained from CBU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as with the Riverside County Assistant Auditor-Controller (Appendix G). Each participant was given assurance that ethical measures were taken into consideration and that the proposed research was approved after a thorough review by the CBU IRB. IRB approval served to ensure that the study would be conducted in a manner that is honest, ethical, and with the highest levels of integrity. The Assistant Auditor-Controller gave the researcher approval to solicit potential accounting participants from the county talent pool. Once all approvals were finalized, interview times were set up for participants. Each participant received an information package that contained a copy of the informed consent (Appendix D), a confidentiality statement (Appendix E), and the Research Participants Bill of Rights (Appendix F). The researcher

assured participants that due diligence had been performed in order to protect participant rights and privacy.

Informed Consent

The purpose of informed consent is to notify participants of any potential risks and benefits associated with participating in the study. The informed consent process aids in establishing trust with research participants. Participants were educated on the steps involved in executing a research study involving human participants. They were also informed that every precaution was taken to protect their privacy. The informed consent also allowed the researcher to audiotape the interview. The ability to capture the full essence of the interview was crucial in order to efficiently analyze and interpret the data. The informed consent was adamant that participants had the right to end the interview or refuse to answer any question they do not feel comfortable answering. If a participant wished to terminate the interview, the researcher did so immediately, and their responses were not a part of the study.

The Bill of Rights provided a comprehensive list of a participant's rights and responsibilities and the responsibilities of the researcher or principal investigator. This list was among the documents in an information package available to the participant the day of the interviews. The informed consent and the confidentiality statement required a digital signature from the participant before the interview could begin. A signature indicates that the participant understood the documents and had freely agreed to participate in the study. The researcher printed out the digitally signed documents, and they were kept in a secured locked safe that was accessible only to the researcher.

Confidentiality

Researchers are obligated to safeguard the identities of study participants and secure the privacy of all data assembled during the research (Shank, 2011). Participants were reassured of the anonymity of their responses to preserve their privacy when communicating their experiences. Actual names of participants were known only to the researcher. An alphanumeric coding system was assigned to each participant. For example, alphanumeric code "MEE01" was assigned to the first participant and "MEE02" was assigned to the second participant, and so forth. Any information that could lead to the identification of participants or the organizations where they worked remained confidential. Personally identifiable information obtained from study results would never be released or made public. The names and sources of direct quotes does not appear in the research document. Audio recordings and transcriptions were password protected and stored with only an alphanumeric code and date. Files were located on a computer that was also password protected and accessible only to the researcher. It is of vital importance to maintain the confidentiality of participants' information and rights during the exploration of the central phenomenon (Stake, 2010).

The cross-reference of participant names to alphanumeric codes, as well as all consent forms, transcriptions, and written documentation (i.e., notes) were securely locked in a safe that was in the sole possession of the researcher. Creswell (2014) suggested that all participant data collected during a research study should be securely stored for 5 years from the date of collection. Researchers must ensure that the data will not be compromised and fall into the hand of other researchers who might misappropriate it (Creswell, 2014).

Protection of Human Participants

The primary role of the IRB is to assess potential risks of the proposed study, examine steps that the research team has taken to mitigate these risks (and protect potential participants), and to weigh these risks against the benefit of the research (in general and/or to specific participants). (California Baptist University [CBU], 2017)

The risks and exposure to human research subjects must be mitigated with procedures that are consistent with sound research design. "Risk" has been defined as the probability of harm or injury (physical, psychological, social, or economic) occurring as a result of participation in a research study (UCI Office of Research, n.d.). In evaluating risk, the IRB should consider any conditions that expose the participant to harm. It is the mandate of IRB that human research subjects be adequately informed of the procedures that will be involved in the research in addition to the risks and benefits of research participation (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979). IRB requires that informed consent is obtained from each prospective human research subject in accordance with federal regulations and IRB policies. The research plan must make adequate provisions for monitoring the data collection process to ensure the safety and confidentiality of human research subjects. Most importantly, the IRB must seek to ensure that the university and the investigators that it serves are compliant with the ethical standards and regulations governing human subject research (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979).

Validity and Reliability

Validity suggests truthfulness, authenticity, and credibility. In qualitative research, validity is achieved when there is a fair, honest, and balanced account of the construct or individuals being studied (Neuman, 2016). Reliability is equivalent to being dependable, stable, and consistent. According to Neuman (2016), validity and reliability are complementary concepts, yet they may conflict with one another as "reliability is a necessity to have a valid measure of a concept. However, it does not guarantee that the measure will be valid" (Neuman, 2016, p. 220). Together validity and reliability ensure the integrity and credibility of the research being performed and the finding being concluded.

In qualitative research, conducting interviews is considered a consistent, reliable technique to record observations (Neuman, 2016). Validity is then achieved when steps are taken to maintain the highest standards of conduct throughout the interview process. This includes strictly following guidelines presented for research processes (interview protocol) and practices and ensuring that participants are honest and not influenced by bias (Neuman, 2016). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological studies are valid "when the knowledge sought is arrived at through descriptions that make possible an understanding of the meanings and essences of experience" (p. 84). To ensure the credibility of the participants' responses, interviews were audiotaped and notes were taken throughout the interview. There was a triangulation of data to ensure not only the consistency of data, but also more importantly, the credibility of the interviews transcribed for this study (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 2010). Every effort was taken to assure that this study was both reliable and valid.

Summary

This chapter outlined in great detail the methodology that was utilized in this study. A hermeneutic phenomenological method of inquiry was chosen for this study to analyze and understand the lived experience of the EE construct through the experience of public sector millennials. The participants were full-time accountants for the County of Riverside, California, who had passed the initial probationary period and had been employed for at least 1 year. The only instrument that was used in this qualitative study was the researcher in the collection of responses to open-ended semistructured in-depth interview questions. The interviews were conducted online using GoToMeeting and they were audiotaped. Notes were taken throughout the interview process to aid in capturing the true essence of the phenomena being studied. Data were analyzed and coded using NVivo (2018) software and Microsoft Excel. Measures were taken to appropriately and effectively protect the identity of all participants and all information collected throughout the study. A strict research process was followed to ensure the integrity, reliability, and validity of the study. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive review of the findings of this qualitative study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Chapter 4 presents the detailed analysis of interviews with millennial accounting-related employees from the County of Riverside. The analyzed data determined the emerging themes based on the experiences of local county government millennials and what they perceive to influence employee engagement (EE). The analysis presented in Chapter 4 includes an explanation of the data analysis method used and how these results relate directly to the research questions of the study. Chapter 4 examines how these questions provided the structure for the conducted study and were the foundation for the research and results. Chapter 4 also discusses the bracketing process, the interview process, the sample demographics, data collection procedures, and the qualitative findings.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore how a purposive sample of 20 local county government employees in an accounting-related position defined EE, what their perceptions and lived experiences were of EE, and what antecedents they perceived to influence EE. Millennial employees are the fastest growing generation in the workforce while simultaneously organizations have been experiencing an influx of baby boomer retirements. According to an article published in the *Government Finance Review* (Lu, 2016), there is a critical need for all levels of government to engage the workforce due to the number of retirements coupled with the ongoing economic challenges facing public sector organizations. Bob Lavigna (2015) noted that with more than 90,000 public jurisdictions in the United States, improving EE can be a powerful tool to improve individual and organizational performance. This study

included the following three research questions, which were designed to provide viable information in order to close that gap:

Research Question 1: How do millennial public sector accountants define employee engagement?

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions, lived experiences, descriptions, and understandings of employee engagement among millennial public sector accountants?

Research Question 3: What antecedents do millennial public sector accountants perceive as having the greatest influence on employee engagement?

To gain insights into a local public sector millennial accountant's perspective on EE, the following 17 interview questions were used to conduct the research:

1. How do you define employee engagement?

2. What is your experience being engaged? Please explain.

3. What factors do you perceive to influence your personal level of engagement?

4. What can your organization do to influence your level of engagement?

5. What does having meaningful work mean to you?

6. What does having work/life balance mean to you?

7. What does being a "fit" in the role that you perform mean to you?

8. What does having your supervisor's support mean to you?

9. What does having your organization's support mean to you?

10. What does having choice and control over the tasks you perform mean to you?

11. What does receiving encouragement at work mean to you?

12. What does receiving timely feedback mean to you?

13. What does having opportunities for learning in your organization mean to you?

14. Describe if having a partnership of give and take with your organization contributes to your level of employee engagement? And why?

15. Describe what the impact of being fully engaged would have on your organization?

16. Are there any other factors that would have an influence on your level of employee engagement?

17. Is there anything else about employee engagement that you would like to add?

   (Wollard & Schuck, 2011).

A qualitative method was appropriate for this study as this method is dependent on the perspective of millennials and their insights and experience with EE. Open-ended questions provided a broader understanding of how millennials define EE, the depth of understanding of their personal experience, and the ability to clearly articulate what antecedents they perceive to influence their level of engagement. Analysis of the information obtained from interviews provided meaning and understanding through the collection of words, phrases, and themes, which helped this researcher to understand how these participants viewed EE and what contributed to or reduced their personal engagement levels.

A phenomenological design allows for the exploration of psychological concepts, such as shared experiences or feelings of engagement, and what specific action encouraged these feelings (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Through individual focused interviews, questions asked sought to obtain an understanding of how the EE experience differed by person, and possibly department, and provided additional insight into EE as experienced by an employee in a local government accounting position.

The objective of this research was to provide public sector millennial accountants with an opportunity to articulate what steps can be taken to maximize an organization's investment in their most valuable assets and newest members of the workforce: their millennial employees. The goal was to receive investment dividends in the form of engagement, productivity, loyalty, and retention. This study will also contribute to an existing and evolving discussion among public sector leaders and human resource professionals regarding the reciprocal relationship that exists between employees and organizations. The ability to create a supportive environment that allows an individual to professionally grow and develop will lead to increased engagement, retention, and the preservation of institutional knowledge.

Bracketing Process

In a phenomenological study such as this one, it is incumbent upon the researcher to perform the critical step of bracketing or epoche (Creswell, 2007). Bracketing is a step that seeks to identify whether there are any personal experiences or assumptions the researcher holds that could influence how the research data are analyzed. The researcher must "bracket" or "shelve" any feelings that may personally influence a participant's responses or the ability to analyze the responses. A list of the researcher's assumptions, personal experiences, and interests follows:

- Assumptions. The researcher approached the study assuming that (a) millennials want to share their experience of being engaged in an accounting-related position at the County of Riverside; (b) the workplace needs to be improved for millennials; (c) millennials want to remain at their organization for a long time; and (d) millennials are misunderstood by previous generations.

- Personal experiences. The researcher is an accountant who (a) works for the County of Riverside Auditor-Controller's Office (ACO), (b) has worked with all county departments in a professional capacity, (c) and has had professional interactions with some of the participants.

- Interests. The researcher is interested in (a) improving the workplace for millennials, (b) giving millennials a voice to express their thoughts and feelings, (c) helping organizations learn to engage with millennials, and (d) informing public sector leaders on the benefits of developing a reciprocal engagement relationship with millennials in the hopes of increasing productivity and providing more efficient and effective services to the citizens of Riverside County.

In addition to identifying and setting aside any assumptions, personal experiences, and interests that may influence the way the data are interpreted, the researcher was also mindful not to make assumptions and draw conclusions based on her own professional work experiences.

Description of the Sample

The target population for this study was County of Riverside employees who were born between 1981 and 2000, who had been employed full time with the county for at least one year and who were in an accounting-related position. Purposive sampling was the primary recruitment method. Participant criteria were submitted in a public information request to the County of Riverside Human Resource Department. The researcher was provided with a list of 194 employees who met the criteria. Ten of the 194 potential participants worked in the Riverside County ACO with the researcher and were thus excluded from participating to avoid any potential issues of coercion.

Three e-mails were sent out soliciting participation. The first round of e-mails generated 11 participants, the second round of e-mails generated another four participants, and the third and final e-mail produced the last five participants to bring the total number of participants to 20. Upon conducting the scheduled interviews, thematic data saturation had been met (i.e., no new themes emerged), thus no further attempts were made to solicit additional participants.

Participant Demographics

Demographic data include participant age, position within the organization, years of service, and gender. Participants were born between 1980 and 2000 and held various positions within their organizations ranging from accounting assistant to fiscal manager. Demographics of the participants were divided into four categories: age, gender, position, and years of service.

Age

The first demographic category was age. The 20 County of Riverside participants ranged from 25 years of age to the oldest participant who was 35 years old. The average participant was 31 years old (see Figure 3).

Gender

The second demographic category was gender. Of the 20 participants, there were 14 females and six males who were interviewed (see Figure 4).

Position

The third demographic category was job position. Participant roles included accounting assistants, accounting technicians, supervising accounting technicians,

analysts, auditors, accountants, fiscal managers, supervising accountants and principal

accountants. Eleven county departments were represented in the study (see Figure 5).

Participant Age

Ages 34 to 36
4 Participants or
20%

Ages 25 to 27
4 Participants or
20%

Ages 28 to 30
3 Participants or
15%

Ages 31 to 33
9 Particpants or
45%

■ Ages 25 to 27   ■ Ages 28 to 30   ■ Ages 31 to 33   ■ Ages 34 to 36
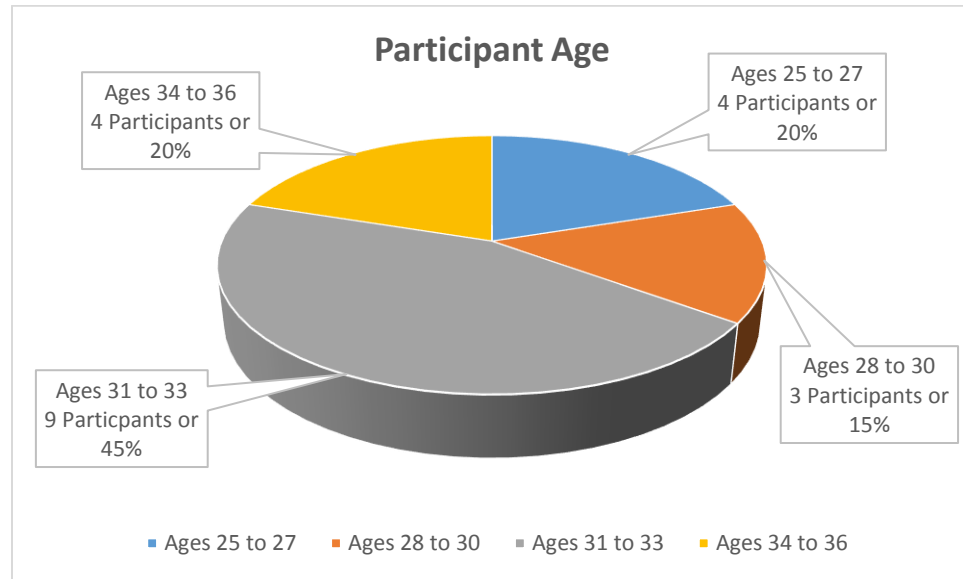
Figure 3. Age of study participants.

Gender

Male
6 Participants or
30%

Female
14 Participants
or
70%

■ Male   ■ Female
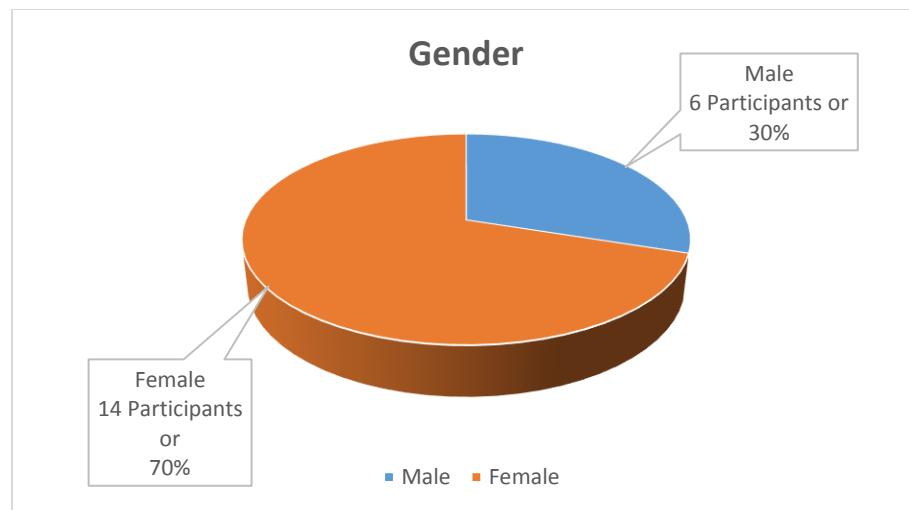
Figure 4. Gender of study participants.
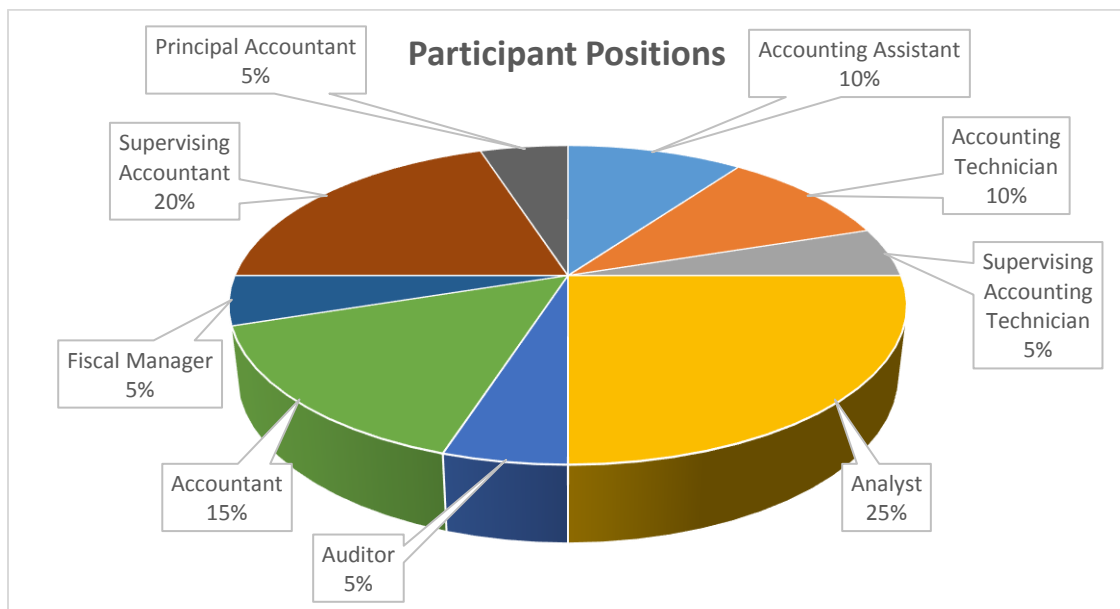
Figure 5. Positions of study participants.

Years of Service

The fourth demographic category was years of service with the County of Riverside. The average years of employment with the County of Riverside for the 20 millennial research participants were 6.7. One participant recently completed his/her first year of employment with the county, while another participant had over 15 years of service. Their length of service in their current position ranged from 3 months to 10 years with the average being 2.2 years in their current organization in their current position. This highlights that while participants have been with the county for a longer period of time, they have, in most instances, promoted either within their organization or to another organization under the county umbrella (see Figure 6).
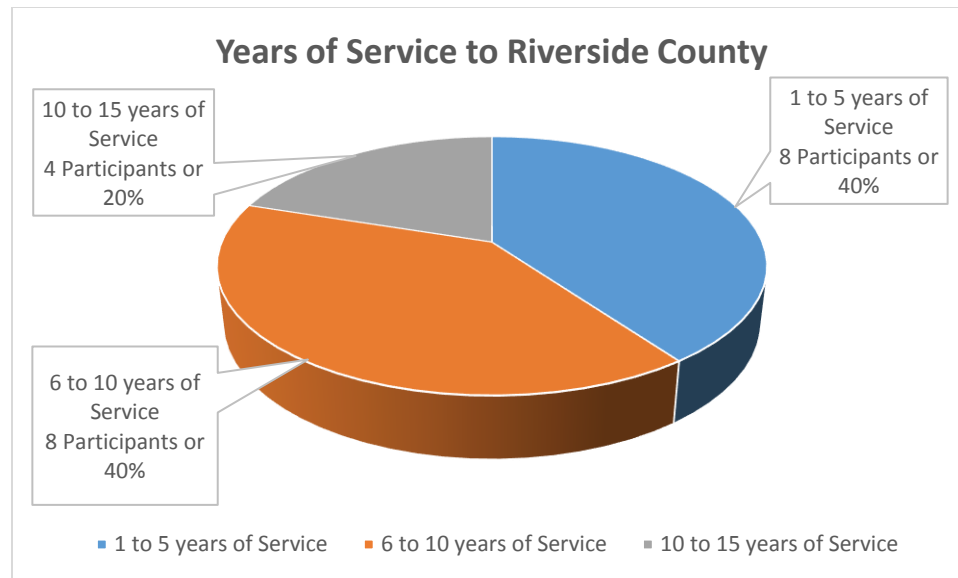
Figure 6. Years of service of study participants.

Interview participant and organizational names were omitted to comply with the confidential nature of the study. Assigning an alphanumeric code to participants helped to keep the identities confidential during the interviews. Pronouns were used in the findings to protect the identity of participants.

Data Collection and Interview Procedures

After potential participants were identified through the public information request, they were e-mailed a recruitment flyer, a letter of introduction, which contained the interview questions, a research participant's bill of rights, a confidentiality statement, and a participant informed consent. Twenty participants agreed to participate in an interview that was scheduled for 90 minutes; however, it lasted an average of 37 minutes. All interviews were conducted online using GoToMeeting at a time that was convenient for the participant.

Once the interview began, each interviewee was given an official introduction and an overview of the study. The researcher reminded the participant of the informed

consent, which explicitly gave permission to record the interview and also reminded the

participant that his or her participation was strictly voluntary and he or she could

withdraw at any time. The researcher reiterated that all identifiable information would be

held in the strictest of confidence, that participation would not be monetarily

compensated, and that the respondent's participation would in no way impact his/her job

with the County of Riverside. At the conclusion of the interview, each participant was

thanked for his or her participation and immediately e-mailed a $10 Starbucks gift card as

appreciation for his or her time and input.

Data Analysis Procedures

In order to analyze the raw data, online interviews were recorded using

GoToMeeting. Immediately after the online interview concluded, the GoToMeeting

recording was converted to an MP4 file and saved using the assigned alphanumeric code.

The file was then uploaded to TranscribeMe to be professionally transcribed.

Transcribed Word Files were received within 72 hours and were then validated against

the audio file to ensure for accuracy. Transcripts were then imported into NVivo 12 Pro

and copied to Microsoft Excel for thematic coding and analysis of keywords, phrases,

statements, and perceptions for the purpose of discovering emerging themes. The

modified van Kaam method was applied to analyze the data (Moustakas, 1994).

Using the modified van Kamm method, written transcripts were reviewed against

the audio recording to validate accuracy. During this very detailed and in-depth review,

any nondescript words, unclear comments, or irrelevant responses were removed. It was

important not to strip the context of any responses in order to capture the full-lived

experience and perception of the interviewee. Individual responses were grouped by

interview questions and applied a descriptive "code" or "node"; they were then identified

by themes or invariant constituents (or nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping clustered themes)

based on similar experiences or perceptions. All codes were reviewed and analyzed for

reoccurrence and usage.

The findings are arranged by research questions, utilizing a storytelling approach

to share the personal stories, feelings, experiences, perspectives, and true insight of

millennials' EE. Quotes were utilized from the participants to illustrate responses to each

of the research questions. Each participant was given an alphanumeric code, and his or

her quotes were identified only by those alphanumeric codes.

Findings

Data from the study helped to determine how local county government employees

perceived EE. Understanding the lived experiences and the connection to related

concepts such as management support, trust, autonomy, and job satisfaction may help

public sector leaders develop strategies to improve EE. Improved EE is associated with

increased organizational commitment, job satisfaction, professional growth and

development and employee retention (Jenkins, 2017).

Interview Question 1

Interview Question 1: "How do you define employee engagement?" addresses

Research Question 1: "How do millennial public sector accountants define employee

engagement?" Explored in Interview Question 1 was the participants' understanding of

EE. Responses indicated that participants defined engagement in a variety of ways and

utilized multiple themes to describe EE. As shown in Table 4, the primary emerging

themes included active involvement (8 out of 20), management support (5 out of 20), and

organizational commitment and professional growth and development (4 out of 20).

Participant responses also provided further confirmation that many definitions of EE exist

and they involve very similar attributes.

Table 4

Question 1 Participant Interview Results

Question 1 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Active involvement	8	40%	MEE002, MEE004, MEE005,MEE008, MEE009,MEE015, MEE019,MEE020
Management support	5	25%	MEE001, MEE008, MEE010, MEE016, MEE018
Organizational commitment	4	20%	MEE003, MEE007, MEE011, MEE014
Professional growth & development	4	20%	MEE001, MEE012, MEE016, MEE018
Relationship	3	15%	MEE001, MEE008, MEE013
Communication	2	10%	MEE014, MEE016
Technical expertise	2	10%	MEE006, MEE019
Input/voice/opinion	1	5%	MEE004
Organizational culture	1	5%	MEE017
Process improvement	1	5%	MEE011
Reciprocal relationship	1	5%	MEE010
Role clarification	1	5%	MEE006
Sense of belonging	1	5%	MEE017
Teamwork	1	5%	MEE014

Significant statements that illustrate the participants' definition of EE have been

provided and quoted whenever possible to give a deeper meaning to their responses.

Actively working with our employees, getting to know them better, and trying to

get them to become better employees for the organization and better people

overall. Making sure that they're always working at their most optimal level. (MEE002)

Demonstrating your skills, knowing what you're doing, what your job roles are, and how you can use your skills to better those around you. (MEE006)

Being committed to meeting the goals of the organization, being enthusiastic and motivated to help your organization succeed, feeling that organization's values you and your commitment to excellence. (MEE007)

The relationship between an employee, their supervisor, and the organization. How they all interact to get the best results of the work that's being performed. (MEE010)

Working as a team and respecting the people and knowing that you're working towards the same goals as an organization and that you really have the best interest of everybody that you work with. Having open communication, having that level of respect for every employee regardless of status or title, or the number of years of service. (MEE014)

The level of belonging that an individual feels when they go to work at a specific organization and the culture of that organization. (MEE017)

How invested, either physically or mentally, an employee is in a task or project or the organization. (MEE020)

Interview Question 2

Interview Question 2: "What is your experience being engaged?" addresses Research Question 2: "What are the perceptions, lived experiences, descriptions, and understandings of employee engagement among millennial public sector accountants?"

Explored in Interview Question 2 were the experiences of a public sector millennial

accountants being engaged. Responses to Question 2 revealed that emerging themes such

as management support (6 out of 20) and professional growth and development (5 out of

20) made up 55% of the participants' experience of being engaged (see Table 5).

Participants also cited autonomy, teamwork, and have input/voice and opinion as the top

reasons they were engaged in their duties. Four or 20% of participants admitted to being

disengaged and their experiences are documented following Table 5.

Table 5

Question 2 Question 1 Participant Interview Results

Question 2 Themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Management support	6	30%	MEE001, MEE008, MEE010, MEE012, MEE014, MEE018
Professional growth & development	5	25%	MEE002, MEE006, MEE007, MEE012, MEE020
Disengaged	4	20%	MEE003, MEE012, MEE013, MEE016
Autonomy	3	15%	MEE004, MEE006, MEE019
Input/voice/opinion	3	15%	MEE006, MEE0007, MEE019
Teamwork	3	15%	MEE014, MEE015, MEE017
Active involvement	2	10%	MEE005, MEE011
Reciprocal relationship	2	10%	MEE007, MEE014
Relationship	2	10%	MEE001, MEE002
Trust	2	10%	MEE007, MEE014
Adaptable	1	5%	MEE018
Communication	1	5%	MEE014
Job security	1	5%	MEE006
Model the way	1	5%	MEE002
Organizational commitment	1	5%	MEE009
Promotional opportunities	1	5%	MEE006
Training	1	5%	MEE007

The level of engagement for a number of participants has evolved over time. Some started off engaged, then were disengaged, and vice versa. At the time of this study, four of the 20 participants or 20% felt disengaged in their organization. Participant MEE003 indicated that she/he is the youngest person on the team and that has caused a disconnect with other team members, and thus she/he has been unable to engage. MEE013 revealed that in his/her organization, "Employee engagement doesn't exist; they make us feel expendable." MEE016 shared,

> In my unit, I'm just an island. I work on a different floor from my unit and management, and they hardly communicate. So things that go on with the accounting unit, I really don't find out until way later or sometimes I don't find out at all. And so I feel like there's no engagement because I don't even talk to my supervisor.

MEE012 and MEE014 had mixed experiences with engagement. MEE012 spent 6 years with one supervisor who, according to MEE012, "was very in tune with each employee." Then within the same organization MEE012 switched sections and reported to another supervisor who was "very single-minded and didn't really allow you to step out of the box of the way that things were being done." This supervisor, as told by MEE012, "doesn't come out of her office. Her windows and doors are closed most of the time. It makes it seem like she's not available to help us when we do need it." MEE012 admittedly does not feel as engaged as she/he did with the former supervisor. According to MEE014,

> Early on when I started with the county, I came into a unit that was more established and had an older generation of people. I came in with a lot of ideas,

and I was very driven, but I had to adapt to an environment that wasn't really as open-minded to somebody new coming in and suggesting things that might require more work as a team to try to better some of the practices, and they didn't really like that. It was a challenge at first to engage with people. I think where I'm at now, I have a great team. I feel that everybody's open-minded, and you're always going to have different groups of people and personalities but I am going to make the engagement because that's important to me.

MEE001 described an experience of being engaged as a direct result of his/her interactions with the supervisor; however, MEE001 did not feel engaged at all at the organizational level. MEE001 said,

My management is super supportive of my educational goals. They've been with me almost every step of the way. I've been with the department for three years and to me, that's a huge thing. I have a very close personal relationship with my management. They know that I have a family and so almost every single Monday, without fail, they always ask me how my weekend is and what me and the kids did, and things like that. That means a lot to me.

However, MEE001 explained that he/she does not feel engaged at the organization level due to the size of the organization and that has impacted his/her level of engagement. MEE001 shared,

My department only cares about the social workers and they could care less about me being an awesome accountant. Even though fiscal plays a huge role in every department, we have to understand that as accountants we are the silent heroes. We're in the back office crunching the numbers. We're figuring out how to find

savings. We're figuring out what we can move budgets around to be able to stay

operational, but nobody knows that. They just see the social workers and the

doctors, the firefighters and the sheriff deputies. They only see who is on the

front line, they don't see us. That could be different for somebody who works at

our Auditor Controller's office because over there, everybody is an accountant,

and they are the main focus. So their employee engagement could be entirely

different in their organization.

MEE002 has used his or her personal experience with engagement to pay it

forward now as a supervisor. She/he said,

I've gotten to know my employees. I've helped them set goals within the

organization, but also with life in general. I also try to be a good example for

them to follow, because I believe that as their supervisor, they look to me for

guidance, and for answers. I need to be the good example for them to follow.

The other participants described their experience of being engaged as follows:

MEE004 feels actively engaged as she/he has a great deal of autonomy in the work

she/he performs. MEE006 said that his/her experience is the definition of engagement.

She/he explained it as follows:

I started there as an intern and then became permanent, I worked my way up the

ladder. This job has definitely allowed me to engage in the positions that I've

been in and has helped give me job security. Being at this position so long,

getting the experience has helped me to understand the whole inner workings with

the department and prove to management the quality of my work. I'm able to

express my ideas and to implement it and that is what makes a difference. I've

done a lot within the department over the years.

MEE007 said,

I feel like my organization invested in me because I'm always being offered

training opportunities that help me expand my area of expertise. I am assigned

work that enhances my knowledge and my experience where maybe in other

organizations, at certain classification levels, you may not be given that type of

work. And to me, that's having good employee engagement because they trust

me to handle more difficult, more challenging tasks, which pushes me and makes

me want to work harder for them because they see the value in me and my input.

MEE009 said,

I feel like I'm fully engaged. I'm enthusiastic and I take pride in my work. I do

everything I can to ensure that I go above and beyond not only just fulfilling my

duties but the goals of our office and organization.

MEE010 also credits the supervisor for her/his engagement.

I would say my experience being engaged would have to do with my interaction

directly with my supervisor, but also the resources provided to me throughout the

organization to perform my work well and to be heard and understood in any

conflicts that may arise during performing my tasks.

MEE018's experience with engagement was that,

You have some managers that really show that they care for you, that they care

for your progress, and they want you to grow as an employee in that organization.

And you have some managers that don't really care about your growth in the

organization or your well-being. They just care about the results. I feel more

engaged with the management style that cares more about the employee that

shows that they care about your well-being, and your personal goals, and your

growth. My current manager, he has monthly one-on-ones and we go over

personal goals, and strengths, and challenges. I feel like that brings out my full

potential and it also brings out any needs that I may have or any room for

improvement that I may have.

MEE019 said,

I definitely currently absolutely feel engaged and have probably since I joined the

county because my bosses throughout my county career have always fostered an

environment where you can do what you're good at and allowing you to do that as

well and not being too overly structured to follow a certain protocol. They will let

you make your own decision, you have to defend it, of course, but they let you

determine your own approach. It's where your opinions count.

Finally, MEE020 explained the evolution of his/her engagement experience.

Early in my career, I wasn't as engaged as I am now because I had other

competing priorities, one being a master's program, the other being the fact that I

was in my early 20s. Also I was performing lower level work and it just wasn't

interesting. I understood that I was just a cog in a wheel, so to speak. But now,

as I've evolved in my career, and I'm taking on new and exciting tasks and

projects, I can say that in my current position this is the peak of my engagement.

It's interesting. There is tons to learn. I feel that whatever I'm doing is

meaningful and I'm working towards something that is going to be impactful for

many years to come. So it's varied between early in my career and where I'm at

now, but I can wholeheartedly say, pretty much my current position, that this is

probably the most that I've ever been engaged.

The overarching theme in a majority of the experiences as told by the participants

is a mutual relationship between management and employees that is built on trust. A

trusting relationship will allow for a great deal of autonomy, and the ability for the

employee to provide his or her input into the duties and functions he or she performs on

behalf of the organization. Participants noted that taking an interest in their professional

growth and development is important to them and weighs heavily in their level of

engagement. They want to be challenged, they want new opportunities, they want to

work collaboratively with other team members throughout the organization, and in return,

these millennial accountants want to work harder, more efficiently for their supervisor,

the organization, and the citizens they serve.

MEE001 did underscore what many other participants articulated during the

interviews. They are acutely aware that the accounting staff play a supporting role in

most of their organizations. As vital as their roles are, many feel their role has been

minimized and is only visible when a "program" needs funding. Accountants play a

critical role that cannot be replaced or eliminated in every organization thus, they really

are the "Silent Heroes" of the County of Riverside.

Interview Question 3

Interview Question 3: "What factors do you perceive to influence your personal

level of engagement?" addressed Research Question 3: "What antecedents do millennial

public sector accountants perceive as having the greatest influence on employee

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engagement?" Explored in Interview Question 3 was a participant's perception of what behaviors influenced EE. Keeping employees engaged is the foundation for productivity and retention; therefore, understanding what influences engagement is important. Table 6 illustrates that 50% of the participants identified management support as the main driver, while communication garnered 20% (4 out of 20), having a sense of purpose 15% (3 out of 20), and self-motivation also 15% rounded out the factors that influenced their level of engagement.

Table 6

Question 3 Participant Interview Results

Question 3 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Management support	10	50%	MEE003, MEE004, MEE008, MEE009, MEE011, MEE012, MEE013, MEE017, MEE018, MEE019
Communication	4	20%	MEE004, MEE012, MEE014, MEE016
Purpose	3	15%	MEE004, MEE005, MEE020
Self-motivation	3	15%	MEE002, MEE006, MEE007
Encouragement/recognition	2	10%	MEE011, MEE019
Reciprocal relationship	2	10%	MEE005, MEE007
Relationship	2	10%	MEE001, MEE013
Teamwork	2	10%	MEE010, MEE017
Active involvement	1	5%	MEE006
Autonomy	1	5%	MEE004
Challenging work	1	5%	MEE011
County benefits	1	5%	MEE015
Feedback	1	5%	MEE010
Greater good	1	5%	MEE010
Input/voice/opinion	1	5%	MEE019
Organizational commitment	1	5%	MEE020
Organizational culture	1	5%	MEE018
Professional growth & development	1	5%	MEE019
Results	1	5%	MEE010

When asked what factors they perceived to influence their personal level of engagement, participants overwhelmingly agreed that support from management was the greatest determining factor in their level of engagement as evidenced by the following participant responses.

The connection that I feel with my management, the support, and the overall workplace environment. If it's a good, healthy environment where you're allowed to make mistakes and you can work together as a team to correct those mistakes. (MEE018)

Having my opinions count and having a boss or manager that helps to encourage development and provide guidance when needed. (MEE019)

Knowing that you have a purpose for what you're doing and it matters, you're not just going through the motions. Also bosses being open-minded and communicating with you. Giving you autonomy in what you're doing and not being overly strict, or micromanaging. (MEE004)

It's really my nature, I am always committed to strive for success. I feel like if I succeed, my organization succeeds and vice versa. How my employer reacts to me, and how they treat me, how feedback is given to me that makes me thrive, and want to work harder, and be more involved, and care more. (MEE007)

Receiving a challenge by a boss or mentor to do something that I've never done before or to make something better. Also receiving encouragement because I want to make them proud of what I've done. (MEE011)

For supervisors to realize that we provide the output so we have to be

physically, emotionally, mentally, professionally, and personally stable. Another

big factor is getting to know your employees on a personal level. (MEE013)

Interview Question 4

Interview Question 4: "What can your organization do to influence your level of

engagement?" also addressed Research Question 3: "What antecedents do millennial

public sector accountants perceive as having the greatest influence on EE?" This

question sought to understand what management at an organizational level can do to

engage millennial participants. Responses indicate that participants continue to find that

their engagement, even at an organizational level, is most influenced by the support they

perceive to receive from management. As shown in Table 7, the primary emerging

themes included management support (5 out of 20), communication, input/voice/opinion

and organizational culture (4 out of 20).

When asked what their organization can do to influence their level of

engagement, management support has remained the primary factor, as supported by the

following quotes from participants:

The culture starts at the top. Whatever the top level is doing, that's what's going

to trickle down to the supervisors, managers, and, ultimately, to the employees. If

they want a specific culture or level of engagement to come to fruition within the

organization, they should be engaged themselves. That involves going around

saying good morning and making sure everybody's on task. Just little things like

getting to know your employees. (MEE002)

Table 7

Question 4 Participant Interview Results

Question 4 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Management support	5	25%	MEE004, MEE005, MEE009, MEE011, MEE019
Communication	4	20%	MEE010, MEE012, MEE014, MEE016
Input/voice/opinion	4	20%	MEE004, MEE006, MEE007, MEE019
Organizational culture	4	20%	MEE002, MEE013, MEE014, MEE019
Promotional opportunities	3	15%	MEE003, MEE009, MEE018
Reciprocal relationship	3	15%	MEE008, MEE010, MEE011
Clear job expectations	2	10%	MEE007, MEE010
Encouragement/recognition	2	10%	MEE007, MEE011
Professional growth & development	2	10%	MEE003, MEE019
Tone at the top	2	10%	MEE014, MEE017
Training	2	10%	MEE003, MEE004
Active involvement	1	5%	MEE020
Challenging work	1	5%	MEE011
County benefits	1	5%	MEE015
Feedback	1	5%	MEE018
Monetary performance incentives	1	5%	MEE018
Not feasible	1	5%	MEE001
Resources	1	5%	MEE005
Team work	1	5%	MEE014

Include me in decisions that actually affect the organization because including everyone makes it feel like you're a part of the decision and your opinions matter. Also, the employer should make job expectations clear and that they align to the mission of the organization. I also think that acknowledging performance would influence employee engagement. (MEE007)

Provide more management support and opportunities for growth.

(MEE009)

The tone of the organization, the tone at the top, how that trickles down to

our own independent, individual teams. So if leadership has the teamwork

mentality, that's going to trickle down to supervisors and management that

touches all of us at every level. So it really just depends on the attitude of the

organization as that being a focus or not. (MEE017)

Supervisors or managers making sure your opinions are heard and

encourage your development. I think a culture of transparency is pretty

important. So if something's going on, give the reasons behind things. So instead

of just top/down directions, being transparent and explaining why. (MEE019)

Involving me from the beginning to get my buy-in will completely

influence my overall engagement. I like to know where we're going, how we

intend to get there. I like to break down the process and understand to the best of

my ability what barriers we are going to be facing. (MEE020)

Interview Questions 5 through 16 also sought to address Research Question 3:

"What antecedents do millennial public sector accountants perceive as having the greatest

influence on employee engagement?" Participants were asked to describe what

meaningful work, work/life balance (WLB), being a "fit," supervisor support,

organizational support, having "choice and control," receiving encouragement, receiving

feedback, having opportunities for learning, and having a partnership of give and take

with the organization meant to them and what impact it had on their level of engagement.

As these were predefined antecedents, the responses were coded to analyze the impact

that it had on engagement and the themes that were previously discovered.

Interview Question 5

In response to Interview Question 5, "What does having meaningful work mean

to you?" all 20 participants indicated that meaningful work was important to their level of

engagement; however, one participant (MEE012) said his/her meaningful work occurs

outside of work yet does not lower their level of engagement. Table 8 shows that 14

participants or 70% of the population indicated that meaningful work contributes to their

organization providing for the greater good or the citizens of Riverside County. Eight

participants said that meaningful work was providing their accounting knowledge and

expertise. Following Table 8 are participant quotes to illustrate the themes.

Table 8

Question 5 Participant Interview Results

Question 5 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Greater good	14	70%	MEE002, MEE003, MEE005, MEE006, MEE008, MEE009, MEE010, MEE011, MEE012, MEE013, MEE014, MEE015, MEE017, MEE020
Technical expertise	8	40%	MEE001, MEE005, MEE007, MEE009, MEE010, MEE011, MEE018, MEE019
Purpose	2	10%	MEE004, MEE019
Customer service	1	5%	MEE016
Efficiency	1	5%	MEE006

Work that's within your classification. I do technical accounting work. I want to

use my brain, I want to use my knowledge in the area that I'm good at to produce

the work that I know I could produce and that will increase my level of engagement. (MEE001)

Providing quality work to my organization, making a difference, and showing that I am an asset to my organization and I'm needed. (MEE005)

Meaningful work is impacting other people's lives in a positive way, which, fortunately, with my department, we are doing that. I know it's really more of supporting the people that do the front level work, but it is nice knowing that I'm supporting the end product and supporting the people who are directly involved in helping the community. (MEE008)

The work matters if the output is shown to me, and that makes me work harder. I get to see that the 5-year-old that was fed cocaine is going to be taken care of because the county can cover their benefits because of a program that I approved and I reviewed and I made sure we had funding for it. I get to see the output. Show me what my work is doing for someone else. (MEE013)

Knowing that you're doing something for the greater good. I know that I may not have direct contact with the people that I'm impacting, but I do know that what I'm doing has an impact on our community. (MEE014)

Contributing and having a positive impact to a vision and overall short-term or long-term goal, or the task at hand. I will be more inclined to be engaged when I have the ability to kind of be part of something—a small part, it doesn't matter how big a part but having the ability to be a part of something that you know is going to affect the greater good, the constituents of the county or even

regionally, that impacts me and that will drive my level of engagement.

(MEE020)

Interview Question 6

There were very strong reactions to Interview Question 6, "What does having

work/life balance mean to you?" Of the 20 participants, all but one indicated that WLB

was very important to them and this factor alone weighed heavily on their level of

engagement. The one participant revealed that he/she was not married nor had children,

which is the only reason WLB was less of an issue as it pertains to their level of

engagement. Participants indicated that because they were in an accounting-related

position, WLB is an issue of concern, as they are unable to take off during month-end and

year-end closing periods (see Table 9).

Table 9

Question 6 Participant Interview Results

Question 6 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Family priorities	13	65%	MEE001, MEE003, MEE004, MEE005, MEE007, MEE008, MEE009, MEE010, MEE011, MEE012, MEE013, MEE014, MEE016
Choice & control	6	30%	MEE002, MEE006, MEE015, MEE017, MEE019, MEE020
Mandatory accounting closing periods	2	10%	MEE003, MEE012
Work priorities	1	5%	MEE018

Participants shared the following analogy and strong sentiments regarding their

experiences of WLB:

It's like you're juggling three balls, two glass balls and one rubber ball. The two

glass balls would be your family and friends, and then the rubber ball would be

your work. If you drop the work ball, you can bounce back or even get another

job. But family and friends are the glass balls that can break and can never be

repaired. (MEE008)

It's taboo to take time off because you're an accountant, and having

month-end closing. Having a flexible schedule is important because they have to

understand that we are people too and we have separate lives from just work.

Cross-training is really important to workplace balance so that we are offered the

opportunity to take time off. (MEE003)

Some people like to work most of the time. They feel that gives their life

meaning, as opposed to others that maybe just want to do their mandated eight or

nine hours a day at the county level. I think it's just being given that opportunity

to make that choice for yourself and to feel that you're in control of the time you

allot to either/or is what increases engagement. (MEE002)

The main reason I left my CPA firm to come to the county is work/life

balance. At the county, I work 40 to 45 hours a week and I put in really solid hard

work when I'm there, but then when I leave work, I leave work. It makes me a

more productive person when I do get that rest because if you're overwhelmed all

the time you're going to make mistakes and you're not going to be as creative.

You need other things in your life than work. (MEE004)

Jobs come and go all the time, you can be somewhere for a very long time,

but once you're gone, they replace you. Your family is what matters. For me,

around the month of June and July, we can't take time off, but those are the

summer months when your kids are out of school and you want to do things. But

yet, you can't even take a week off of vacation because it's year-end closing.

(MEE012)

Work-life balance is knowing employees have a life outside of work. There has to be understanding of people as individuals who are doing a job and they're not just employees. I need that work-life balance to be able to produce in different areas of my life and I know that can make me be the best employee when I'm at work so I know there's going to be some give and take. (MEE014)

Interview Question 7

Interview Question 7 states, "What does being a 'fit' in the role that you perform mean to you?" When asked what being a "fit" means to the participants, according to Table 10, 13 participants or 65% felt that their accounting knowledge and expertise made them a fit for the job they were performing. Six participants indicated that in addition to the technical skills, in order to be a fit, one must have the soft skills that are associated with personality and social skills. Three participants said that because their job and tasks were predefined, they had to make their selves fit within the organization. Two participants noted that fit is equivalent to "survival" since, if employees are not able to survive and fit within the organization, their job will be on the line and they may not have passed their probationary time. Two participants felt that being a fit was directly linked to the culture of the organization, while one participant indicated that autonomy was important and another participant noted that collaboration was related to fit. Those experiences are conveyed in the comments below Table 10.

Table 10

Question 7 Participant Interview Results

Question 7 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Technical expertise	13	65%	MEE001, MEE002, MEE003, MEE004, MEE005, MEE007, MEE010, MEE011, MEE012, MEE014, MEE017, MEE018, MEE019
Soft skills	6	30%	MEE002, MEE004, MEE007, MEE010, MEE014, MEE016
Adaptable	3	15%	MEE008, MEE009, MEE020
Culture fit	2	10%	MEE010, MEE014
Survival	2	10%	MEE006, MEE013
Autonomy	1	5%	MEE005
Collaboration	1	5%	MEE015

Having all the right experience, the right education, the basic requirements for that job, it also means that you have the personality and social skills. It also depends on what the organization is looking for. (MEE002)

Being able to execute my task with minimal or no supervision and guidance. Being able to apply my previous experiences and education and knowledge so I can make well-informed decisions on my duties. (MEE005)

Not only having the knowledge, the skills, and the abilities, but I think personality is key in determining fit because a person's values needs to match the values of the organization. You need to be a good cultural fit because people work better when they're in more positive surroundings. (MEE007)

The job specs are already preset so you have to make your skills fit. The whole county system is structured, and you got to do what that job already does. (MEE008)

Being a fit is everything. It really determines how well the person will

survive in the unit and the department. Obviously, if someone wasn't a good fit

for a position that they had, they're not going to work as hard. They are not going

to want to be better or to work harder. That definitely is a big factor in trying to

determine my level of engagement. (MEE006)

Being a fit in the role that I perform means that the culture has been

developed in the organization or the team that I'm working with or in, that I'm a

good fit for that culture. That my personality type, my work type, the tasks that

are asked of me to be performed, that it all fits. (MEE010)

Being a fit definitely works both ways. I enjoy the work that I do and it

meets with my skillset. The skills I have and the knowledge I have can fit into

what the department needs. When you have a good fit, it definitely engages you

more because you feel confident in your role. (MEE011)

If you are a good fit and fill the position well, that keeps you engaged.

(MEE017)

Interview Question 8

In response to Interview Question 8, "What does having your supervisors support

mean to you?" all 20 participants indicated that supervisor support influenced their level

of engagement. There were comments such as supervisor support is a huge thing, means

everything to me, is meaningful, means that they are valued, means the world to me, and

is extremely important. Participants perceived that they were supported by their

supervisors when they felt their supervisor had their back, was able to communicate

effectively, was a good listener, provided feedback, recognition, and cared about their

professional growth and development, cared about their family, trusted them, and gave

them a voice. Table 11 illustrates the main themes from Question 8 and comments below

also substantiates the themes.

Table 11

Question 8 Participant Interview Results

Question 8 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Perceived supervisor support	18	90%	MEE001, MEE004, MEE005, MEE006, MEE007, MEE008, MEE009, MEE010, MEE010, MEE011, MEE012, MEE013, MEE014, MEE015, MEE016, MEE017, MEE018, MEE019, MEE020
Communication	4	20%	MEE002, MEE006, MEE014, MEE017
Trust	3	15%	MEE002, MEE013, MEE020
Professional growth & development	2	10%	MEE003, MEE015
Resources	2	10%	MEE003, MEE010
Encouragement/recognition	1	5%	MEE015
Feedback	1	5%	MEE005
Input/voice/opinion	1	5%	MEE002
Relationship	1	5%	MEE018

Having my supervisor's support is a huge thing. It's like my supervisor going to

bat for me for the good and the bad and that completely impacts my engagement.

(MEE001)

Supervisor support means everything to me. It means the supervisor can

trust me, rely on me, and in turn, allow me to be more open to them with any

suggestions for the organization or requests that I may have. There needs to be

communication and trust. (MEE002)

Having them provide guidance and assistance when needed or when they feel it is appropriate, also to have constructive feedback whenever they see I need assistance with something or if they feel that there's a better way of doing things. I would like for them to show me support by giving me continuing feedback on what needs to be done. When they're providing me that type of support, I can fully engage more and feel confident in how I'm engaging with my day-to-day duties. (MEE005)

It's very important to have a supervisor who is willing to listen to your ideas and willing to be open-minded to a lot of the issues that are out there and what your solutions are for them and her not necessarily always dictating that. (MEE006)

Having my supervisor's support means that I am of value. Supervisor support is definitely the key to employee engagement. (MEE007)

Having the support of the supervisor makes for a better environment at work and it definitely makes it harder to leave knowing that you have a good environment like that. It helps being engaged and ready to work because you know that you have it good. (MEE008)

Having my supervisor's support is extremely important because you're more interactive with your supervisor than the organization. Having my supervisor's support to give me the resources that I need to complete tasks or finish projects is important. Also having a supervisor that acknowledges me and is able to give me feedback and back and forth communication with projects or

tasks, makes me feel like I understand what my part is in the organization and

then I'm more willing to work hard to complete everything. (MEE010)

It means they trust my level of work and the knowledge from our degrees

can back up our justification on whatever decisions we make. (MEE013)

Having a positive relationship with your supervisor is about just

communicating with them, letting them know what your goals are, and what

you're having issues with, or anything that really impacts you. Supervisors

should be good listeners who can understand, listen, respect, and try to consider

options for you, or try to see what your best fit is within your unit. An open-

minded supervisor helps the whole team to be on the same page and working

towards the same goals of improving the team. (MEE014)

Having your supervisor is really important because I feel like they truly

care for me, not only in a professional manner, but also on a personal level and

they have their best interest in me. I feel like they are investing in me . . . and

giving me feedback on my performance and giving me ways or alternatives on

how to improve myself. (MEE018)

MEE011 credited her/his success to the supervisor. She/he explained,

I reached where I am today because of my supervisor's support and

encouragement. I've always been blessed to have them include me in things that

were beyond my role so that I could learn new things and challenge myself.

That's always helped me to be more engaged in what I do because it goes back to

just wanting to not disappoint and wanting them to be proud of the work that I've

done. (MEE011)

MEE003, on the other hand, admitted,

> I'm actually struggling with supervisor support right now and not having that
>
> unmotivates me. Having my supervisor support is very meaningful. The
>
> supervisors and managers are supposed to be serving the people under them, and
>
> personally developing their staff. I think it's really important for supervisors to
>
> support their staff, to be there for them personally and professionally develop
>
> them rather than having someone who delegates and tells them what to do. It's
>
> like, you don't care so why should I care, type of attitude. I really pride myself in
>
> my work, but personally and emotionally it does affect me.

Interview Question 9

Interview Question 9 states, "What does having your organization's support mean to you?" The findings on organizational support were not unanimous or as favorable as that of supervisor support. These findings are consistent with research, which concludes that engagement between a supervisor and employee is far more effective than between the organization and the employee (Eisenberger et al., 1986). It was discovered during this interview question that participants who were in large organizations felt more disengaged as the focus was primarily on the programs they provided to the citizens rather than to the support staff. Some of the accountants revealed that the only attention they received at the organizational level was when someone had a question about budgets or program funding. According to Table 12, five of the 20 participants or 25% expressed that at the organizational level they were not engaged, and their experiences are documented following Table 12.

Table 12

Question 9 Participant Interview Results

Question 9 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Management support	7	35%	MEE004, MEE005, MEE007, MEE011, MEE014, MEE018, MEE019
Org support not needed/realistic in large dept	5	25%	MEE001, MEE006, MEE008, MEE013, MEE016
Organizational culture	4	20%	MEE004, MEE007, MEE012, MEE015
Reciprocal relationship	3	15%	MEE005, MEE007, MEE020
Relationship	3	15%	MEE003, MEE011, MEE014
Communication	2	10%	MEE011, MEE014
Program support focus	2	10%	MEE001, MEE002
Resources	2	10%	MEE005, MEE010
Training	2	10%	MEE004, MEE005
Competitive salaries & benefits	1	5%	MEE005
County benefits	1	5%	MEE017
Efficiency	1	5%	MEE004
Encouragement/recognition	1	5%	MEE015
Equal pay and benefits	1	5%	MEE009
Feedback	1	5%	MEE014
Input/voice/opinion	1	5%	MEE014
Purpose	1	5%	MEE016
Teamwork	1	5%	MEE002
Work/life balance	1	5%	MEE010

My department is so big that it is very hard for me to feel that having the support

of my entire department in order to shape my engagement is realistic, it just

wouldn't happen. It is far more crucial to be a social worker than to be an

accountant here. The social workers are the ones whose education is being paid

for. (MEE001)

I'm in a smaller organization but the majority of the employees are social

workers. I've tried to be more engaging with all the other supervisors on the

program side because fiscal, in particular, was just kind of its own little thing, and

they were just the people you'd go to when you need to know how much money

you have. We just got a new director recently and I think she's kind of taken that

role to include not just people on the program side and the ones that are out in the

field doing the work, but also the administrative side to make sure that everybody

feels inclusive. And I think that it's very conducive to an overall great work

environment. (MEE002)

I don't know if organizational support will impact my level of employee

engagement because the department is so large and I'm just one small person

within this department. (MEE006)

Having the organization's support would be drastic because we have a

fairly large organization. Personally, it would mean that I have accomplished

what I've gone to study for, and in the eyes of the organization, that I am more

than capable of doing my job and providing more than what is the standard

requested of me. I would take more pride in working for the county and doing the

things that I do. (MEE013)

I work for a large organization and it is very hard to engage in my job, and

with coworkers. It's so much easier knowing that you have an organization

backing you because it feels like you're working for a purpose. (MEE016)

I'm not sure about the whole organizational support. They provide a

paycheck and I'm very grateful for that and the comfort having a job. I'm not

really looking at it from needing their support, in a sense. (MEE008)

I really just look to my boss. I don't necessarily look to the whole

organization to support me. (MEE019)

Seven of 20 or 35% of participants said that their engagement is not predicated at

an organizational level. Most felt that the size and the role of the organization made it

difficult and sometimes impossible to engage at an organizational level. The balance of

the participants did indicate that organizational support is important as it shows that they

care and trust their employees and will provide the training and resources necessary to

perform their job duties. MEE011 said,

> You can't just do your job by yourself, so having everyone be there for each other
>
> definitely helps out a lot. In the county as a whole, it's nice when George
>
> [Riverside County CEO] and Lisa [Riverside County COO] come around to
>
> different departments and do their different videos, just to show that they are
>
> thinking of everyone, even though they don't know all 20,000 employees. It is
>
> important to me to know that they are trying to look out for everybody and even
>
> when the department head is taking the time every once in a while to going
>
> around and talking with people, I think that's a really good thing.

MEE015 added,

> There's a lot of appreciation from upper management and just our supervisors in
>
> general. And I feel like that really positively impacts what I do and how I feel
>
> about coming into work every day. They have a very positive environment going

on. I feel like it affects my everyday duties in a positive way because I want to go

out and I want to help people. I feel competent in what I'm doing and I'm happy

at what I'm doing.

Interview Question 10

In response to Interview Question 10, "What does having choice and control over

the tasks you perform mean to you?" five millennials or 20% of participants expressed

that they do not want to be micromanaged. Instead, they want autonomy and they want

to give their input, make their voice and opinions heard. Five participants indicated that

choice and control does not influence their level of engagement because they do not have

a choice over the activities and duties they perform (see Table 13 and comments

following).

Table 13

Question 10 Participant Interview Results

Question 10 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Autonomy	9	45%	MEE001, MEE003, MEE006, MEE009, MEE010, MEE011, MEE016, MEE017, MEE018
Input/voice/opinion	4	20%	MEE003, MEE004, MEE007, MEE019
Not important	4	20%	MEE005, MEE008, MEE012, MEE015
Professional growth & development	3	15%	MEE002, MEE014, MEE020
Reciprocal relationship	1	5%	MEE013

Having choice and control means not micro-managing. If I'm given a task, I'm

not one that wants everything spelled out and being told exactly how to do it and

how it's going to be presented. I want them to tell me what they are looking to

resolve and let me use my mind to work freely. That would 100% affect my

engagement, because I feel like I need creative control. I have a different way of

thinking, and a different way of going about things, and a different way of coming

up with results to where it may not be the same way that you come up with it, but

I guarantee we'll come to the same conclusion, or I may come to a better one.

(MEE001)

Choice and control gives me the opportunity to do tasks and duties that are

interesting and engaging to me as opposed to being forced to do something that is

probably not very conducive to my overall growth as an individual and

throughout my career. To have that opportunity to more or less pick and choose

which tasks you can do, I think is very, very beneficial for any employee,

regardless of what level they are in the organization. (MEE002)

That means my boss isn't hovering over, micromanaging, and looking

over every little thing I do. I've had a lot of freedom here at the county, if your

boss gives you more control over your job duties and control over your time, then

I feel they trust me with this job, and know that I'm going to get it done, and do a

good job on it. (MEE011)

It's very difficult to do my job when I'm not getting the proper authority

to make choices on things because at the end of the day the person who

specialized in my job is me. So having have a discussion with me and hear what I

think about what you're going to implement. Hear how that's going to affect me,

how that's going to affect people under me. I think it's really important to allow

autonomy in my own work also because it builds confidence and accountability. (MEE003)

Having choice and control over my tasks means that I'm looked at as a innovative and creative person and I'm efficient. I don't need to be micromanaged. It means I can be counted on to help the organization achieve their goals, it means my opinions matter. It means I'm of value. It means even though everyone's replaceable, it'll be difficult to replace me. (MEE007)

Having choice and control would give me the opportunity to bring innovative ideas and it would allow me to enhance my field of study, maybe encompass more in my direct area of work. I would probably take on more tasks and more duties. (MEE013)

At this point in my career, having choice and control over tasks, it doesn't really mean much to me. I take on everything that I can that gets put on my desk Because to learn as much as you can so I can contribute as much as I can. (MEE020)

Interview Question 11

In response to Interview Question 11, "What does receiving encouragement at work mean to you?" each participant indicated that receiving encouragement did influence EE; however, one participant acknowledged that although he/she would prefer not to receive verbal encouragement he/she would instead want to receive rewards or encouragement in the form of new challenging tasks and duties. Of the participants, 75% indicated that receiving encouragement caused them to want to reciprocate with

increased productivity and the quality of the work they provide (see Table 14 and comments following the table).

Table 14

Question 11 Participant Interview Results

Question 11 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Reciprocal relationship	15	75%	MEE001, MEE002, MEE003, MEE004, MEE006, MEE007, MEE008, MEE009, MEE010, MEE012, MEE015, MEE016, MEE017, MEE018, MEE020
Feedback	2	10%	MEE014, MEE019
Management support	2	10%	MEE005, MEE013
Meaningful work	1	5%	MEE020
Professional growth & development	1	5%	MEE011

It gets to people when their work goes unnoticed. When it does get noticed, it serves as a motivating factor to continue to do what you're doing, because you don't want to feel that you're doing all this hard work and putting in all the hours and the effort for nobody to even say a thank you. It provides that extra little boost so they know that what they're doing is beneficial for the overall organization and that it does not go unnoticed. (MEE002)

Encouragement is good because it builds confidence. (MEE003)

Encouragement is very important because it shows that they're being supportive and they're also motivating us, and acknowledging us, that they see all the hard work that we are doing. (MEE005)

Encouragement is empowering. It makes you want to make better decisions. That's big for retaining employees. (MEE007)

Encouragement at work is simply a "You did a great job," or "Thank you for pointing that out." Simple words and that impacts the level of engagement. (MEE013)

Receiving encouragement can be anything from a comment, to an e-mail, to a high five, or just getting mentioned, to receiving an office level award or recognition, even departmental recognition. So having at least some type of recognition or some type of comment helps you or encourages the behavior that you are doing that's good. So you want to do more of what you got kudos for. (MEE017)

I think receiving encouragement is really important because it gives you that validation that you're doing a great job and hearing praise from your managers is really important and it's really good for me. It keeps me wanting to be that engaged employee, it drives me to do my best every day, and be all about the company and all about the organization and I think it's really important. (MEE018)

It's extremely reassuring to hear that I'm doing things the right way and that my contributions are meaningful. When you hear that you're on the right path, especially being new, that drives you a little further to do more. It's always nice to please people, especially to prove your worth. (MEE020)

I think receiving encouragement at work, means you're going above and beyond when you don't have to. I think it's important because everyone needs a little encouragement sometimes, even when it's not expected. So if you don't receive any encouragement for the things that you are doing, for me, it would

lower my level of engagement. Because it's like you're doing all this hard work,

but there is no appreciation for it. (MEE012)

Interview Question 12

In response to Interview Question 12, "What does receiving timely feedback

mean to you?" all 20 millennial participants agreed that receiving timely feedback

strongly influenced their level of engagement. They indicated that receiving feedback

showed that their supervisors cared about their professional growth and development (see

Table 15 and comments following the table).

Table 15

Question 12 Participant Interview Results

Question 12 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Professional growth & development	15	75%	MEE001, MEE002, MEE003, MEE004, MEE005, MEE007, MEE008, MEE009, MEE010, MEE011, MEE012, MEE013, MEE017, MEE019, MEE020
Communication	2	10%	MEE014, MEE018
Encouragement/recognition	2	10%	MEE015, MEE016
Efficiency	1	5%	MEE006
Reciprocal relationship	1	5%	MEE003

It's nice to receive timely feedback, but I understand that management is busy. If

it's not feasible to provide feedback within the next day or so, I would appreciate

if someone would tell me that they are busy, and they'll provide feedback when

they have the time. (MEE009)

It's good to have honest feedback. A lot of people are scared of

confrontation so they just tell everybody that they're doing fine, and that does not

help out anybody. I think you can deliver feedback in a good, positive way.

Timeliness has an impact because if once a year your being told how you're

doing, that does not help if you're doing it wrong and you find out a year later.

Feedback doesn't have to be formal, like a formal evaluation, it can be a quick,

"you did a good job," or "I think we need to I prove upon this." (MEE004)

In my opinion, feedback isn't necessarily just for the employee receiving

the feedback, but it's also for the organization as a whole because if I know how

I'm doing and what I need to work on to improve, that just aids the organization

overall because, then, I can provide better customer service. And that in and of

itself increases employee engagement. (MEE007)

It means more to me when I hear feedback at the end of the day before I

leave and my supervisor tells me, "Wow. You did great today." It means more to

me because I go home thankful for that day. That would mean more to me that

than hearing it a week later. The timeliness is important because it feels like I'm

getting positive encouragement daily instead of weekly or monthly. I feel like

there is a time limit on when nice things are said like during that annual review.

If I'm only getting it once a year, I'm going to feel nice for a good week maybe

and that's all. (MEE015)

You don't want to hear about something good that you did 3 months ago.

You want to hear as its happening and on a continuous basis. It helps keep you

engaged in wanting to harnesses that behavior. (MEE017)

I don't take hints really well; I'm more of a direct communicator. I like to

be approached directly to tell me if what I'm doing is right or wrong. There's no

right time to give feedback, it's when something happens. The sooner the better. (MEE018)

If it's an important task, it's extremely frustrating to not get timely feedback. (MEE016)

Nobody wants to wait around for information, for answers, when it's affecting their job. It's a level of respect for me. And for me that engagement comes in because you might get frustrated if you are not hearing from someone for days or weeks. You're kind of like, "Did I even matter to them?" It's important to have that feedback, timely. Of course, everyone's busy but as long as you can try your best to respond quickly, it creates a more effective, efficient, and happier environment. (MEE014)

Interview Question 13

Interview Question 13 states, "What does having opportunities for learning in your organization mean to you?" According to Table 16, 18 of the 20 participants stressed the importance of having opportunities for learning within their organization. When given opportunities for learning, participants expressed a desire to reciprocate with increased work productivity. There were two participants who indicated that training is not a factor in their level of engagement. MEE016 said, "Training is an added benefit; however, it does not impact my engagement." MEE009 expressed that there were not opportunities for learning within their organization. Following the table are comments from the participants.

Table 16

Question 13 Participant Interview Results

Question 13 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Professional growth & development	16	80%	MEE001, MEE002, MEE004, MEE005, MEE007, MEE008, MEE009, MEE010, MEE012, MEE014, MEE015, MEE016, MEE017, MEE018, MEE019, MEE020
Reciprocal relationship	5	25%	MEE003, MEE008, MEE010, MEE011, MEE013
Promotional opportunities	2	10%	MEE006, MEE018
Training	1	5%	MEE008

Nobody wants to stay stagnant. Opportunities for learning develop me as a person and as a professional. It allows me to advance in my career, and ultimately, the more I receive, the more I want to give. (MEE003)

For those with a CPA license, we have to get our training. It's really important to stay up to date with all the new things that are going on. If my employer does not think training is important, that basically means that they're not invested in the future, and they're not invested in learning and invested in your growth and their growth. I would become disengaged if continuing education or training was not a big part of the culture. (MEE004)

If we have staff who has potential, who is willing to learn, and if we are stopping them from learning, I feel like we're shooting ourselves in the foot. (MEE006)

Having opportunities to learn and to grow means that you're invested in me. Especially as an accountant, our rules are constantly changing. There's always new GASBs [Governmental Accounting Standards Board

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pronouncements] and updates that you need to review. If I'm not provided with opportunities to learn, I can't help my organization grow and achieve its mission. (MEE007)

Being a millennial, we've been taught how important education is. So the organization is giving us opportunities to continue our learning. They understand that education is never a finite answer that you can always continue to learn and grow. And that not only benefits you as an individual but them as the organization. (MEE010)

Your supervisor giving you that opportunity for learning is the most significant thing to me and it makes me want to engage even more because that just shows me that you trust me and you think that I'm capable of learning something beyond where I'm at. (MEE011)

I think learning new things is very important because once you become stagnant in doing the same thing, mundane things over and over again, it just lowers your level of engagement because you're not growing, you're not doing anything different. (MEE012)

Opportunities for learning is being able to try new things, explore other areas, and it absolutely is a driver to your engagement. (MEE019)

Learning opportunities are the types of opportunities I embrace. I never pass up on an opportunity to learn something new. It's how you grow. It's how one would evolve to becoming an efficient public servant. And that affects your engagement because learning is engaging. (MEE020)

Interview Question 14

In response to Interview Question 14, "Describe if having a partnership of give and take with your organization contributes to your level of employee engagement?" three of the 20 participants felt that there is no give and take within their organization however, it does not impact or influence their level of engagement. Sixty percent of participants acknowledged that a reciprocal relationship exists when there is give and take between the employee and the supervisor/organization. Participants' responses are documented below Table 17.

Table 17

Question 14 Participant Interview Results

Question 14 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Reciprocal relationship	12	60%	MEE002, MEE003, MEE005, MEE006, MEE007, MEE011, MEE013, MEE014, MEE016, MEE018, MEE019, MEE020
Management support	3	15%	MEE004, MEE007, MEE014
Autonomy	2	10%	MEE017, MEE020
Communication	2	10%	MEE006, MEE010
Not realistic in dept	2	10%	MEE001, MEE012
Efficiency	1	5%	MEE013
Organizational culture	1	5%	MEE014
Professional growth & development	1	5%	MEE011
Promotional opportunities	1	5%	MEE013
Resources	1	5%	MEE020
Self-motivation	1	5%	MEE009
Trust	1	5%	MEE020

One participant had an alternate view of give and take; instead, he/she expressed the relationship as "give and give." MEE007 explained,

I think the partnership should really be give and give. I don't know that things will work well with a give and take relationship. Obviously, there's something being taken, but if you have the mentality that my employer gives to me and I give back, I think you'll gain more naturally. If an employee gives of their time, knowledge, and skills, in return, they should be given a positive work environment, praise for good performance, opportunities for learning and growth, and a paycheck. It's a togetherness because if my organization fails, I fail. And if they succeed, I succeed.

As with any relationship, it has to be give and take. It's not always going to be 50-50, but it's got to be close. You don't want to feel you're putting in all the work, time, and effort and you feel like you're not getting anything back. You want to feel what you're doing is beneficial and that you're going to get more out of it other than, just a paycheck in our case. (MEE002)

Having a partnership of give and take is important because it's compromises from both ways. Sometimes, the organization can compromise with the employee when they need to take time off for unforeseen situations. And vice versa, the employee would have to do compromises for the organization when the organization is experiencing financial hardship or just the shortage of employees. Having give and takes on both levels is appreciated because they did compromises for me and I would do it for them. (MEE005)

Having give or take shows that the organization is trying to grow just as I am. We're giving. We're taking. So we're both growing. (MEE003)

Give and take is part of effective communication. You have to balance the give and take. You want to give more of yourself when it's asked of you because you know that it'll be reciprocated later on. (MEE010)

A good give and take relationship will engage me more and help me do better work in the organization. (MEE018)

Give and take leads to more effective, productive, and efficient work. If I'm going to give of myself and take the initiative on a project, I want to see how much you give back to me because all I'm asking for is a little encouragement, some more learning, and maybe a promotion when I prove myself to you. (MEE013)

A lot of employees don't understand how good we have it here. But, for me, coming from outside the county, the give and take makes me want to work harder and it impacts my level of engagement in a positive way because I want to give extra. (MEE016)

With the organization it can't be a one-way road where you feel like I'm giving this my all but I'm not getting anything from the organization. There has to be takes such as flexible schedule and the ability to do what I do best. It leads to being more engaged so you're doing a better job, probably more efficient, and more effective. (MEE019)

Give and take contributes directly with engagement. The fact that they're giving you the tools, they're trusting you on how to actually use those tools or resources and kind of run independently on that project. That speaks volumes on the level of trust that they have for you. (MEE020)

In most of the responses, the acknowledgment of a reciprocal relationship proved that the fundamental basis for any relationship is the ability to perceive to have received some type of benefit; then in return, there is a reciprocal exchange transaction that seeks to provide benefit to both parties. MEE012, on the other hand voiced a vastly different experience and noted that if there were give and take, they would be engaged. She/he explained,

> I don't feel like there's any give and take in my organization. I feel like they give the minimum and expect the maximum from me. So even if there were any give and take, it wouldn't be an equally, "I'll give you this, if you do this." I think if they gave a lot more, it would impact my level of engagement for sure. Of course I would work harder.

Interview Question 15

Interview Question 15 states, "Describe what the impact of being fully engaged would have on your organization?" Every study of EE that has sought to find a universal definition has failed to do so; however, every study, including this one, has proved that when an employee is engaged, there are consistent behavioral patterns. Engaged employees are more productive, more committed, and more satisfied in the work they are producing and there is a clear and direct benefit to the organization in which they serve. Table 18 shows the effects of millennial engagement. The one participant (MEE001) who said engagement was not feasible acknowledged that at the organization level, it is not feasible due to the size of his/her department, yet she/he is fully engaged within his/her fiscal section and with his/her immediate management team. Participant quotes follow Table 18.

Table 18

Question 15 Participant Interview Results

Question 15 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Reciprocal relationship	7	35%	MEE003, MEE007, MEE008, MEE010, MEE016, MEE017, MEE020
Efficiency	6	30%	MEE003, MEE004, ME011, MEE012, MEE014, MEE018
Greater good	4	20%	MEE002, MEE007, MEE014, MEE018
Increase in morale	2	10%	MEE002, MEE005
Input/voice/opinion	2	10%	MEE003, MEE009
Process improvement	2	10%	MEE003, MEE011
Professional growth & development	2	10%	MEE006, MEE013
Teamwork	2	10%	MEE010, MEE017
Not feasible	1	5%	MEE001
Reduced attrition	1	5%	MEE002
Relationship	1	5%	MEE015
Results	1	5%	MEE019
Training	1	5%	MEE003

Being fully engaged would definitely increase morale of all the employees
throughout the organization and reduce attrition. Employees would be more
inclined to stick around if they know that there's an engagement not just from the
top down but laterally. We're all here for a good cause. You just want to feel
you're part of something. (MEE002)

I think that if I were completely engaged, I would be able to contribute
more of what I know to the organization. If I were given a little bit more
freedom, and if my opinion felt like it mattered, I would be doing so much more
for the organization. I would be implementing new processes. I would be
researching things. I'd be attending training. But I'd be looking for ways to

make us better. If they would engage all of us, they would have stronger, faster, more efficient, motivated and happy employees. (MEE003)

It would be a positive impact because employees would be passionate about their job and they would take their tasks with utmost care and ensure its being performed to the best of their ability. (MEE005)

Being engaged can create efficiency, innovation. Also I think it makes you happier, even with your peers. (MEE004)

I think being fully engaged would improve customer service because if your employees are happy they can provide better customer service, which for us is the public. Having a fully engaged work environment means that you'll have increased recruiting, increased retention. People will want to work harder. They'll work smarter. People will want to work for you. They won't want to leave. (MEE007)

I think the impact of me being fully engaged would have a positive impact on my organization because it's going to help the organization be stronger, more effective, more efficient, more of a fulfilled environment. Engagement coming from employees really helps the environment because when we're encouraged and we're valued, then we all, as a team, want to give back, and want to produce, and want to be working with each other as a positive team environment. And I think that makes the whole organization grow, it makes the individuals grow, and makes for a much more efficient organization. (MEE014)

Being fully engaged should be the ultimate goal of the organization because, if we're not, we may seek other opportunities and feel like we could go

somewhere else. If we're not engaged and our minds are not active and we don't

feel like we're being challenged, then maybe we look for a challenge elsewhere.

If every member was fully engaged, then the organizational goals, as well as

camaraderie between all the employees, would be very strong. Meeting the

objectives of the business would be easy to do and also, keeping everybody

connected in and outside work would be also strong and easy to do if everyone

were engaged. (MEE017)

If staff members in general are engaged, I think you have better outcomes.

They're going to do a better job. It's one of those things that it spreads. If you

have an engaged employee, they can rub off on other employees. (MEE018)

When an employee is fully engaged, that means that they're plugged in

100% in terms of what the organization expects from you, and so you produce.

It's all about making impactful, meaningful contributions to what we're trying to

achieve and constantly proving your worth. The impact of being fully engaged in

the organization means that we're all on the same page knowing that we're

working and striving towards the common goal. (MEE020)

We would be more like a family. That's really important in that we spend

at least 9 hours a day there. Instead of "Happy wife, happy life" its "Happy

employee, happy life." (MEE015)

Interview Question 16

Interview Question 16, "Are there any other factors that would have an influence

on your level of employee engagement?" sought to identify if there were any other

factors, not previously discussed, that emerged as themes that would influence the

participants' level of engagement. As shown in Table 19, WLB resurfaced as a dominant

factor that influences engagement. It is also important to millennials to have a voice.

They want to provide and share their input and opinions; they want their ideas to be

heard. Monetary compensation did arise, and although it is not the primary factor for

most millennials, it is still very important (see Table 19 and quotes following the table).

Table 19

Question 16 Participant Interview Results

Question 16 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
WLB	5	25%	MEE004, MEE006, MEE009, MEE011, MEE012
Input/voice/opinion	3	15%	MEE004, MEE010, MEE019
Monetary compensation & benefits	3	15%	MEE001, MEE015, MEE018
Reciprocal relationship	3	15%	MEE007, MEE017, MEE018
Training	3	15%	MEE001, MEE017, MEE019
Clear job expectations	2	10%	MEE003, MEE006
Communication	2	10%	MEE010, MEE016
Encouragement/Recognition	2	10%	MEE005, MEE019
Feedback	2	10%	MEE005, MEE007
Promotional opportunities	2	10%	MEE001, MEE014
Self-motivation	2	10%	MEE002, MEE011
Autonomy	1	5%	MEE017
Choice & control	1	5%	MEE004
Fair and equal treatment	1	5%	MEE005
Increased morale	1	5%	MEE003
Management support	1	5%	MEE004
Professional growth & development	1	5%	MEE007
Relationship	1	5%	MEE003
Resources	1	5%	MEE019
Succession planning	1	5%	MEE007
Technical expertise	1	5%	MEE019
Tone at the top	1	5%	MEE020
Tuition reimbursement	1	5%	MEE001

More opportunities for advancement, training opportunities, better health care, and tuition reimbursement. (MEE001)

Being treated fairly and equally and evaluating employees based on their work performances. Recognition is very important. (MEE005)

Opportunities to learn and to grow because you should always want to improve your skills. The organization should always prepare the person below you to take your job and beyond. If I see that's what you're instilling in me then I want to work harder for you because then you believe in me. Feedback is also a big factor. (MEE007)

I need to see my leadership and superiors lead by example. (MEE020)

Additional pay would engage me more. (MEE015)

I do think that we have kind of lost that work/life balance. I've seen a lot of people leave our organization and the root of it is because we lost balance. (MEE009)

More flexible schedule, being able to take a week off in June and not be penalized for it. (MEE012)

Having the right tools to do your job. Resources such as managers having enough staff, employees having the right equipment like computers, having access to the right systems, and also training. (MEE019)

Communication is my main pet peeve. (MEE016)

Knowing exactly what our job roles are and how they affect everybody else. That's not how it is right now and we are having a really hard time. (MEE006)

For me, personally, I would still do my level of engagement as I see fit because, that's the standards to which I hold myself. Being a good example is contagious. (MEE002)

Interview Question 17

Interview Question 17, "Is there anything else about employee engagement that you would like to add?" was designed as to allow participants to freely speak on their thoughts, opinions, and experiences of EE. They were able to share anything they perceived to add value to the line of questions that were asked. Participants shared a variety of thoughts, some of which were previously covered; however, they wanted to expand on their initial thoughts or feelings. The themes and thoughts are shared below.

Employee engagement is very broad and it will be completely different for each person. As an organization, accommodating every single person's wish list for how you can make somebody completely engaged would be so difficult and that's probably why it's a give and take for most people in the departments. We're not all going to be ecstatic about every single action taken. There's going to be somethings that is not being given to us and I think it's unreasonable to expect all these perfect things especially working for the government. (MEE001)

Engaging employees is definitely vital for any organization regardless of what industry or role you're in. Everybody needs to have that level of engagement from all the way to the top, to the new employee just coming in. Everybody needs to be actively engaged within the organization. Everybody plays a key role. Everybody should be recognized for their efforts. Make it so that everybody wants to do a good job. At the end of the day, we're here to do a

job, but there's more to it than that. Like a machine, machines don't work well if

they're not taken care of and maintained. Eventually, it falls apart. But with good

maintenance and with good active engagement, in this case, I think that any

organization can survive as long as everybody is engaged with each other and

make sure that everybody does a good job in the end. (MEE002)

Table 20

Question 17 Participant Interview Results

Question 17 themes	No. of participants	% of participants	Participants
Management support	5	25%	MEE008, MEE011, MEE014, MEE016 MEE017
Organizational culture	5	25%	MEE002, MEE008, MEE013, MEE014 MEE018
Tone at the top	3	15%	MEE012, MEE014
Communication	2	10%	MEE014, MEE017
Mentorship	2	10%	MEE003, MEE014
Monetary compensation & benefits	2	10%	MEE004, MEE018
Professional growth & development	2	10%	MEE003, MEE011
Reciprocal relationship	2	10%	MEE001, MEE012
Anti-millennial engagement	1	5%	MEE019
Clear Job Expectations	1	5%	MEE006
Collaboration	1	5%	MEE014
Efficiency	1	5%	MEE011
Encouragement/recognition	1	5%	MEE002
Input/voice/opinion	1	5%	MEE006
Promotional opportunities	1	5%	MEE003
Relationship	1	5%	MEE009
Transparency	1	5%	MEE014
Trust	1	5%	MEE006

I know that we're there to work, but having a more comfortable, more fun environment, something that we actually look forward to going to every day. I think that it's very underrated how important people's feelings are in work, because the way we feel dictates how we perform. We are people at the end of the day, and feeling like we're important, feeling like we mean something to the organization, is important. I really believe that feeling like a family at work is really important. And just because I know that this study is millennial based, I think that being treated like an adult is important for employee engagement. The number of years that you have working or living doesn't dictate your adulthood, so being treated like I can be taken seriously despite the generational gap is important to me. (MEE003)

I always see these studies saying, "Money doesn't matter." But I think that's the core. I'm engaged in what I do, but if I was only getting paid half of what I could get paid doing the same thing somewhere else, I'm probably going to go to that other place. It's the foundation of why we're all here. (MEE004)

The only reason why I have stayed in my organization is because I've been given opportunities to express my ideas. Having a voice and the fact that they listen to me is important. I feel like they have that trust in me that they have give me the ability to make changes, give my ideas, my opinions, and then listening to it and actually seeing the changes. It keeps me there and engaged. I think when money is the issue, then it kind of changes. But money isn't really the issue. It's more important that you like what you're doing. (MEE006)

I have come to the realization that it's not all about the money always. I mean, it is a part of the factor of where you work, but I think you're more tending to maybe stay if you have that support, that good environment and that you're more engaged. You're not necessarily more engaged just because of the money but the support and the environment that you work in helps you be more engaged. (MEE008)

It seems like organizations have lost care for their employees to a certain extent. And I think that that is going to affect employee engagement in our office. (MEE009)

If people were more engaged at work, productivity and efficiency would be much more improved. That's just one of the things I'm trying to do now that I'm a supervisor. I'm trying to get my staff engaged and keep them engaged because I know that you're just so much more productive that way. I put up different motivational quotes around the office. I try to give them little goodies and snacks to try to make them happy. I talk to them to try to see if there's anything in their job they're unhappy about or if they're any new job duties they'd like to learn. If they have been doing the same thing for 5 years and want to try something new, I'm really trying to train them on new job duties. (MEE011)

Employee engagement is a two-way street though and in order to have employee engagement, you need to have upper-levels to help with that. (MEE012)

I think employee engagement is something that millennials are going to expect, and organizations have to take into consideration that they need to start

doing it. Because if they don't do it they are not going to attract the workers.

(MEE013)

I do believe that if we want to see employee engagement going forward in

our organizations, then it definitely needs to be talked about and encouraged.

There definitely needs to be a level of change in that thought process from upper-

level management, because it really depends on individual managers, how the

county or the organization is really conducting itself. Because not everything is

consistent when it comes to different organizations or different managers. So if

that's the goal of the organization, to be engaged, to have employees engaged,

then there has to be definitely a mind-set change from that level. The change in

mindset has to do with individual leadership. (MEE014)

Making sure there is a strong leader in the supervisor position because

they're the foundation. If you have a weak foundation, then the rest of it can't

stand up straight. It's like with a building, if you have a weak foundation, then

the rest of the building won't be able to stand up. You need a strong foundation.

(MEE016)

I think they do a pretty good job at the county as far as communicating

with everyone and creating events that will not only engage the employees but

also the communities we live in. I think that's important. I think if they could do

something a little bit better it would be making sure management at every level

was involved with the activities of keeping us engaged with our community and

our job. For the community, they have health and wellness fairs, 5K runs and

fishing days, for example. Management should at least be more involved with

promoting those events instead of lower levels trying to engage themselves. (MEE017)

I think that for millennials right now, engagement is really something important to talk about because now we're seeing that our engagement levels are declining and there's more attrition in the organization. There's been 10 people that left within the last 6 months and they all left for better opportunities, better paying jobs, and I think that millennials are really driven by that. And as far as engagement, I know for me, that environment is secondary. So primary would be monetary and secondary would be the work environment and the management style as well. I don't like to stay in one position for more than a year. I want to constantly keep growing, keep learning, keep moving up the ladder. Right now, I have all those things, it's just that monetary piece. I think that a lot of millennials are being disengaged in the workforce and I think that's just due in part to the compensation. (MEE018)

Lastly, according to MEE019,

Employee engagement, doesn't matter when you were born. You give those things to anyone and they will be motivated. I have staff who work for me who are in their 20s. I have staff who work for me who are in their 50s. Both of them are going to respond to engagement the same way. So both of them if I don't give them tools they need, they're both going to be disengaged. If I don't listen to their opinions, they're going to be disengaged. So my big opinion is that the year someone is born has very very little impact to employee engagement. More importantly it's the individual person. You take two people who happen to be

born on the same day let alone the same generation, they're two completely

different people that have two different ways that they're motivated. One person

maybe very heavily motivated by recognition if you go and give them a pat on

their back every day and tell them they're doing a great job. Then that may

motivate them. You go to the second person and they may hate that. But to me

the science, the concept of doing studies based on generations is a complete waste

of time. Because at best, you're going to get anecdotal information, but to me as

a manager and as somebody who's trying to interact with other people, it doesn't

help me because you're trying to paint people with a broad brush. You're trying

to say, "Oh everybody who is a millennial responds well to this." I say, "Well no

actually maybe 80% of them," so I can't really use that. It's almost like saying

well all women are emotional, no that's not correct. And that will get you into

trouble if you start assuming that, right? I think we need to start looking at

ageism and generational differences. I think we need to start looking at that

concept the same way that we look at sexism, or even dare I say racism. So that's

my opinion. (MEE019)

Summary

Chapter 4 described the findings from the semistructured interviews of local

government millennial accounting participants who voluntarily participated in the

qualitative phenomenological study on EE. Chapter 4 presented a detailed discussion of

the applied modified van Kaam methodology and identified themes. Included in the

discussion were actual quotes from participants, as recommended by Moustakas (1994).

Study results support the fact that a universal definition of EE will remain elusive. This study revealed that among local government millennial accountants, a reciprocal relationship is formed when they feel supported, they can perform work that highlights their technical expertise while serving the greater good, they are growing and developing professionally, they are working autonomously, and they have a voice to provide their input, their ideas, and their opinions. Perceived supervisor support has proved to be the most influential antecedent of engagement. Many millennial participants credit their success, growth, and development to their supervisor (see Figure 7).

Top Millennial Employee Engagement Antecedents
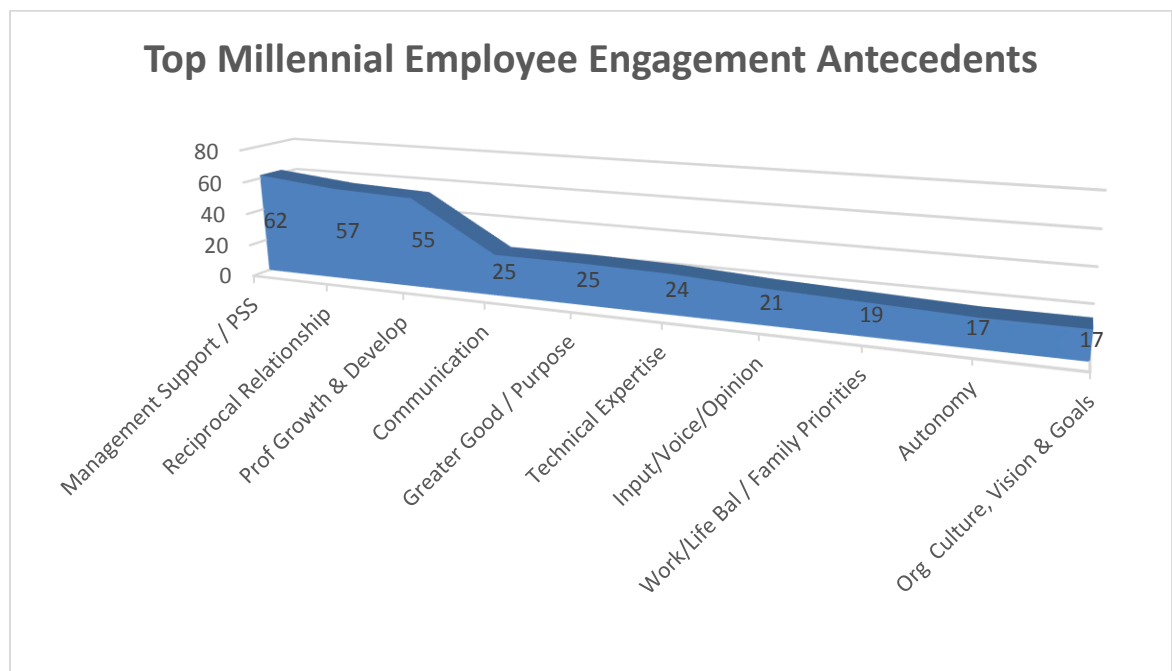
Figure 7. Top 10 millennial EE antecedents.

Respondents discussed their lived experiences of EE. From those experiences, other antecedents to a millennial's engagement emerged such as WLB and personal relationships. Participants shared that family priorities are just as important as their work priorities. Millennials also want their supervisors to care about them and about what is going on in their personal lives. Millennials, unlike any other generation, genuinely

wants to have a relationship with their supervisors. They want mutual trust, respect, and

caring for their professional and personal life. Millennials treat their relationship with

their supervisor as an extension of their relationship with their parents. This study has

conclusively shown that when millennials perceive to receive these antecedents, it does

indeed create a mutually beneficial and satisfying reciprocal relationship between the

employee and the supervisor (see Figure 8).
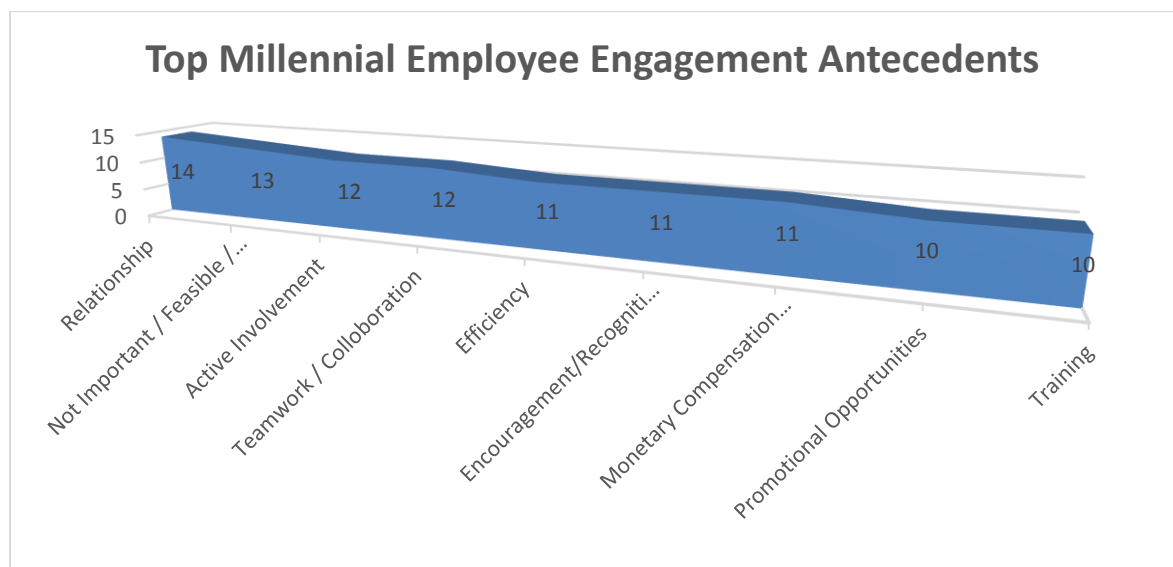
Figure 8. Top millennial EE antecedents.

Presented in Chapter 5 are the results of the research questions, the essential

themes that emerged from the study, recommendations for future research, and a

concluding summary.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Millennial employees are entering the workforce and changing the dynamics of the organization they serve. At the same time, baby boomers are leaving the workforce in droves, causing managers to question how they can effectively engage this newest cohort, who is vastly different from their older generational cohorts. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to identify how local county government millennial accountants define employee engagement (EE) and to discover what antecedents they perceive to influence engagement in the workplace through the lived experiences of 20 participants. Chapter 4 included a comprehensive review of the interview questions and participant responses as well as an analysis and presentation of the findings. Chapter 5 includes the conclusions reached, the themes identified, recommendations for additional research, and a summary of the study.

Study Conclusions

Twenty participants responded to 17 interview questions, which were developed to answer the study research questions. Participants offered their definition of EE, which closely correlated to their own experiences of being engaged. Participants discussed their lived experiences of being a millennial accountant in a local public sector organization. They also provided concrete explanations and examples to illustrate which antecedents were most influential in their levels of EE. The current section includes a detailed discussion of the study results, identified themes, and recommendations for public sector leaders. The purpose of conducting phenomenological research is to develop a deeper understanding of a construct or an idea (Creswell, 2005). Explored in the current study was EE directly from a millennial accountant's perspective. The results derived from this

study can provide public sectors leaders with the tools necessary to increase EE while also increasing productivity and retention within their organizations.

Three research questions provided the foundation for this research. The research questions and results are as follows:

Research Question 1

How do millennial public sector accountants define employee engagement?

Millennial accounting participants described EE as using their technical knowledge and expertise in being actively involved in either their duties or a project. They also indicated that EE is the organization, supervisors, and managers being actively involved with the employee and his or her job duties and functions. EE was described as the commitment toward developing an employee both professionally and personally. Millennials emphasized the relationship aspect of EE. This involves employees feeling cared about by their supervisors and supervisors showing a genuine interest in the millennials' personal lives. This is a relationship that involves open communication and trust by both parties. In return, millennials indicated that being engaged would enable them to work to their full potential and contribute to making the organization more efficient and effective in obtaining their mission, goals, and vision.

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions, lived experiences, descriptions, and understandings of employee engagement among millennial public sector accountants?

Participants shared that being engaged was the direct result of their supervisor and the support that they perceived to receive from them. Support for millennials came in the form of showing interest in millennials' personal/educational goals, their professional

development, the level of autonomy supervisors allow millennials to exercise in the execution of their duties and assignments, training and promotional opportunities that are made available to millennials, and the support of the millennial's family life. When millennials felt supported, they equated that to their organization investing in both their professional and personal growth. In return, millennials reported feeling enthusiastic, taking pride in the work they produced on behalf of the organization, and paying that same behavior forward as they became supervisors.

Millennials want to thrive when doing work that is impactful to the organization and community. It is important that millennials perform work that is technical and meaningful. They have to understand how their task serves to meet the mission and vision of the organization. Millennials will become disengaged if they are performing routine tasks and work that is deemed "busy work."

There were participants who discussed being disengaged from their organizations. The main contributing factor was the lack of support from the organization and their supervisor. It was described as a disconnect between the millennial and the supervisor, the supervisor not being open-minded to change, and the supervisor not engaging in conversation or caring about the millennial and the work she or he was performing for the organization. In one instance, the millennial shared that his/her current supervisor rarely came out of the office and kept the windows and doors of his/her office covered. This lack of support led participants to feel disengaged and in search of an organization that could provide the support they were seeking.

Disengaged participants also reported feeling that the support role they played in their organizations was not valued by management. Participants noted that they felt like

the "Silent Heroes" of their organizations because they were responsible for funding and keeping programs financially stable, yet they received little to no credit or recognition for their hard work and efforts. This most often occurred in larger organizations where the focus was on the positions that directly supported the mission and goals of the organization. When describing their role, participants described being in a back room crunching numbers. Participants did not even feel that the space they occupied within the organization took a prominent role in the organization. They did not feel valued or supported by their organization at all and this led to a number of participants to admittedly becoming disengaged.

Research Question 3

What antecedents do millennial public sector accountants perceive as having the greatest influence on employee engagement?

Participants were initially asked what factors they perceived to influence their level of engagement. Next, a specific list of individual and organizational antecedents were provided to participants so they could describe if those antecedents influenced their level of engagement. The list of antecedents included meaningful work, WLB, being a "fit," having supervisor support, having organizational support, choice and control, encouragement, feedback, opportunities for learning, and having a partnership of give and take with the organization. As the interviews drew to a close, participants had a final opportunity to add any antecedents that influenced their EE that had not already been discussed and were important to their level of EE.

Table 21 shows that participants were unanimous in choosing supervisor support, encouragement, feedback, and opportunities for learning as the antecedents that most

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influenced their level of EE. Least influential as an antecedent to EE were organizational

support and choice and control. The participants who indicated that organizational

support was not a factor noted that the size of their organization made engaging

employees seem improbable. This is an area that could benefit from a future study.

Research has shown that employees have daily contact with their supervisors; thus, that

relationship is perceived to be far more important than having a relationship with the

organization (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Further, Blau (2008) noted that when employees

perceive that their supervisors are supportive, they will reciprocate by helping the

organization achieve its mission and goals.

Table 21

Influence on EE Antecedents

	Has an influence on EE		Has NO influence on EE	
EE antecedents	#	%	#	%
Supervisor support	20	100%	0	0%
Encouragement	20	100%	0	0%
Feedback	20	100%	0	0%
Opportunities for learning	20	100%	0	0%
Meaningful work	19	95%	1	5%
Being a "fit"	18	90%	2	10%
WLB	18	90%	2	10%
Partnership of give and take	17	85%	3	15%
Choice and control	15	75%	5	25%
Organization support	14	70%	6	30%

Note. N = 20.

Millennials want to be inspired and motivated. They also want someone they can

look up to and follow, someone who they feel truly cares about their well-being (Deal &

Levenson, 2016). This is consistent with the research results, which clearly show that

millennial participants in this study want support, feedback, and encouragement.

Millennials have a strong desire to partner with their organization to meet their mission, vision, and goals. They simply need a supportive supervisor who will allow them to have a voice and provide their input, to work either autonomously or collaboratively with a team, give them regular and timely feedback, to have work/life balance (WLB), and the opportunities for training, development, and growth.

The millennials in this study also highly value WLB. The primary theme related to having family priorities was that millennials do not want to sacrifice time with their family for their work priorities. Millennials want balance; they want to be able to work hard and put in their full shift and then go home and enjoy their family. There was frustration shared over the fact that, as accountants, there are mandatory financial statement closing periods that prohibit participants from taking off during month-end closing and year-end closing. While these closing periods are not subject to being changed, participants want to see more cross-training, which they feel would allow them to take off during these critical times.

Participants indicated that WLB was extremely important and a number of the participants left private sector employers to join the county in order to have WLB. Of the two participants who indicated that WLB did not influence their level of engagement, one noted that she/he is at a young age and not married nor has any kids; thus, he/she is more focused on work (MEE018). The other participant previously worked at a CPA firm and indicated that the county experience with WLB is much better than what she/he is used to; thus, it is not as great a factor in his/her engagement. She/he also indicated that the work that she/he does is more important because she/he already has achieved a greater sense of balance in his/her life (MEE019).

Interpretation and Emergence of Universal Themes

Seven universal themes emerged from the responses collected in the semistructured interview questions. The themes served as guidance and direction for translating meaningful answers to the research questions. Following are the universal themes:

Theme 1: Employee engagement is important to public sector millennial accountants.

Theme 2: The key to millennial EE is having supportive supervisors who make their employees feel valued while showing care and concern for both their personal and professional growth.

Theme 3: Millennial employees want to engage in work that is meaningful and contributes to the greater good.

Theme 4: Employee engagement is enhanced when organizations foster an environment where millennials can feel their voice is heard; they can give their input and opinions and perform their tasks autonomously.

Theme 5: When millennial employees are engaged, they seek to reciprocate with increased productivity, efficiency, and retention.

Theme 6: Increasing EE can be effectively accomplished without spending any of an organization's budgeted funds through the use of feedback, encouragement, and recognition.

Theme 7: Individual antecedents are more influential to a millennial accountant's level of EE than organizational antecedents.

In the following sections, each theme is interpreted according to the context related to the research questions.

Theme 1

EE is important to public sector millennial accountants.

EE was associated with passion, commitment, serving the greater good, and a sense of achieving an accomplishment. In response to Research Question 1, participants defined their understanding of EE as utilizing their technical accounting knowledge and expertise in projects and duties that serve the greater good of the organizations they serve. They also defined EE as supervisors who develop a supportive and trusting relationship with millennial employees who seek to optimize both their professional and personal growth and development. Participants positively described EE using words such as investment, commitment, trust, relationship, communication, teamwork, caring, belonging, expertise, and contribution and making a difference.

Addressing Research Question 2, millennials described their lived experiences of EE as feeling like an investment to the organization, feeling valued, trusted, supported by supervisors, enthusiastic, and taking pride in the work that they perform on behalf of the organization. These are elements millennials expressed as being critical to creating a culture of EE. When participants were asked how being fully engaged would impact their organizations, they described it as increased morale, being more productive and fulfilled in the roles they play within the organization.

Participants noted that EE is vital for the organization. However, in order to effectively seek to engage employees, the tone must start at the top. If an organization is seeking to improve the level of engagement, it must be a priority at the highest level of

the organization, and it must be actively and consistently practiced and applied throughout the entire organization. MEE016 described it as EE "being the strong foundation for which the organization can build its successes upon." EE, if properly executed is the behavior and tools that as millennials grow and promote within the organization, they seek to emulate with their staff. It was viewed as a way of paying it forward for what their supervisor did for them and the support they felt along their journey through the organization.

Theme 2

The key to millennial employee engagement is having supportive supervisors who make their employees feel valued while showing care and concern for both their personal and professional growth.

Addressing Research Question 3, this study revealed that the key to millennial engagement starts with the direct supervisor and proved to be the antecedent that had the greatest influence on EE. For those participants who were disengaged, it was a direct reflection of their relationship with their supervisor. Those participants who reported being engaged declared that they felt their supervisor valued them, trusted them, and cared about them, and many mentioned that their supervisor "had their back." In the research, Deal and Levenson (2016) documented that helicopter parents were those older generational parents who managed every aspect of their millennial child's life. Now that millennials are in the professional workforce, they want the same level of support that their parents provided and they want their supervisor to navigate their career as their parents navigated every step of their life.

Millennials want to feel valued and cared about by their supervisor, just as their parents cared about and valued their well-being as they were growing up. It is important that simple acts of kindness, such as saying hello and good morning and asking about an employee's weekend and family, will make the impression that the supervisor cares about his/her employees. Millennials want the same level of care, concern, and support from their supervisors as they received from their parents. Millennials want their supervisors to be personable and care about their personal life but also provide the mentoring and guidance to ensure that they are progressively growing and developing within their professional career.

Millennials identified "developing a relationship" as the emphasis for feeling engaged with their supervisors. Building good relationships, according to the *Supervisor's Survival Kit* (Goodwin & Griffith, 2008), promotes personal effectiveness and increased productivity. Millennial participants shared how meaningful and instrumental their supervisors were in every aspect of their career from teaching them, coaching them, developing them, and being there to answer questions and guide them in the performance of their duties. Millennials were clear that they want and need supervisors support, yet they did not want to be micromanaged at all.

Theme 3

Millennial employees want to engage in work that is meaningful and contributes to the greater good.

Millennials have been conditioned to believe that they can make a difference; thus, the work they perform must be meaningful (Caraher, 2015). Research Question 3 includes meaningful work as an antecedent that greatly influenced EE. The millennial

accountant participants in this study elucidated that they did not want to spend their time doing work that was viewed as routine and not adding to the value of the organization. They wanted to perform work that showcased their technical expertise.

Many of the participants acknowledged that the work they performed, although meaningful, played a supporting role to the primary mission of their organization. They described feeling like a "cog in the wheel" as they often did not have direct contact with the citizens they served. MEE008 said this of the work they perform: "I know it's really more of supporting the people that do the front level work, but it is nice knowing that I'm supporting the end product and supporting the people who are directly involved in helping the community."

The participants that acknowledged serving in a supportive role yet were still fully engaged, credited their organizational leaders for sharing and communicating results that allowed all employees to celebrate in the successes of the organization as a whole. MEE014 shared,

> I think for myself and my generation, we want to make an impact and we want to see things change. My organization provides feedback as to what they're doing with their programs. And seeing that, gives me a sense of happiness and fulfillment because I see that we are helping people. And even though I do not work directly with those people, I know that I am connected to the people that are working directly with them.

Meaningful work to millennials is "wanting to feel a sense of accomplishment and that their work is contributing something useful to society," according to MEE015.

Theme 4

EE is enhanced when organizations foster an environment where millennials can feel their voice is heard, they can give their input and opinions and perform their tasks autonomously.

Millennials, unlike any other generational cohort, feel empowered to say what they think, and if they do not feel that their voice is being heard, they will become disengaged (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Millennials can offer great insights and fresh perspectives, so allowing them to provide their input can add value to the organization and enable them to feel directly involved in the achievement of organizational goals.

Feeling involved and included emerged as one of the greatest factors influencing EE. Participants want to be a part of the organization's planning and decision-making processes. According to the results of this study, active involvement, communication, participation, commitment, collaboration, purpose, motivation, pride, and productivity played a critical role in the millennial participant's level of EE.

Due to the level of technical expertise among millennial accounting participants, autonomy was of critical importance. Three of the millennial participants were certified public accountants (CPAs) who worked at CPA firms prior to joining the county. Having attained the highest professional accounting designation, they do not want to be told how to perform their job duties and functions. Participants expressed a desire to have the freedom to design a project or to revamp it and perform process improvements. Millennials want to be told the objective of the project but not how to get there, and they want feedback along the way to ensure that they are moving in the right direction. Being part of a major project, system implementations, and being in an environment where

one's opinion is heard and valued, according to participants, takes them to the peak of their engagement.

When organizations embrace millennials, they have an opportunity to bring change and efficiency to their organizations. Older generations have been known to make the statements like "that's how it has always been done" and "why reinvent the wheel." With millennials, once given autonomy and support, they will take that wheel and redesign it to make it faster and more efficient with the newest technology. Millennials do not want to do what's been done over and over, they want to make it their own and make it better for the organization. Leaders have to be open to change and willing to give millennials a voice. When organizations combine the institutional knowledge from older cohorts with the creativity and technical abilities of the newest cohort, this can represent dramatic change that will benefit all parties: the employees, the organizations, and the citizens.

Theme 5

When millennial employees are engaged, they seek to reciprocate with increased productivity, efficiency and retention.

Millennials are driven to do their best to achieve the mission and goals of the organizations they serve (Dorsey, 2010). Engaged millennials, according to Dorsey, are focused on their organization's objectives and are constantly seeking ways to better meet those objectives; the more engaged an employee is, the more valuable he/she is to the organization. When millennials are empowered to have a voice, they seek solutions and alternative ways of performing functions and duties. They seek to bring efficiency to

their tasks and take advance of available technology, which enables them to work smarter, as MEE007 acknowledged.

Throughout the interview process, millennial participants often spoke of what they received or felt about a particular antecedent, then followed up with their reciprocal reaction. MEE007 said, "My organization invests in me . . . makes me want to work harder because they see the value in me and my input." MEE018 noted that when his/her supervisor shows that he/she cares about the employees' well-being, personal goals, and growth, it brings out their full potential. Reciprocal behavior was also described as participants not wanting to let their supervisors down, proving that they can take on a challenging task and master it, and also making their supervisor proud of the work they are performing on behalf of the organization.

Millennials want to find an organization where they perceive to be a "fit" and feel connected (Deal & Levenson, 2016). In return, millennials will be loyal, hardworking, and committed. While monetary compensation was really important to two participants (MEE015 and MEE018), most millennials indicated that their level of productivity, loyalty, and engagement was driven by the support they receive and the quality of the work they perform.

Theme 6

Increasing EE can be effectively accomplished without spending any of an organization's budgeted funds through the use of feedback, encouragement, and recognition.

Millennials are the first generational cohort to require instant feedback (Abrams & Von Frank, 2014). Millennials want to know how they are doing on a regular basis

because they were raised receiving timely feedback; thus, their expectations have not changed because they entered the workforce. Millennial participants indicated that the ability to receive timely feedback enhances their growth and development. Receiving feedback right after completing an assignment or project provided the opportunity for millennials to learn from their mistakes and how to problem solve. Managers should adopt regular weekly or monthly meetings to discuss an employee's progress toward goals, brainstorm issues, or simply to check in (Fu, 2016). Not receiving timely feedback made participants feel as if they were not valued and the work they were performing was not critical to the success of the organization.

Encouragement and recognition is a critical factor in the building of a reciprocal relationship. Therefore in response to Research Question 3, encouragement, praise, and recognition has a great influence on EE. Participants reported feeling empowered, confident, and validated when their supervisor acknowledged their efforts. Millennial participants remarked that encouragement can come in the form of a simple comment of "good job," an e-mail, or even a high five. It does not have to be elaborate, just timely and genuine.

Participants overwhelmingly agreed that feedback and encouragement were highly instrumental to their level of EE. The advantage to any organization is that it can reap the benefits associated with showing encouragement, recognition, and increased EE, yet there is no financial impact to the organization. Providing timely feedback, being encouraging, showing care, concern, and support, and helping employees feel connected to the organization does not have an associated cost with it but will generate the greatest

dividends. Supervisors cannot afford to underestimate the power of an encouraging

word, showing recognition, and providing feedback.

Theme 7

Individual antecedents are more influential to a millennial accountant's level of

EE than organizational antecedents.
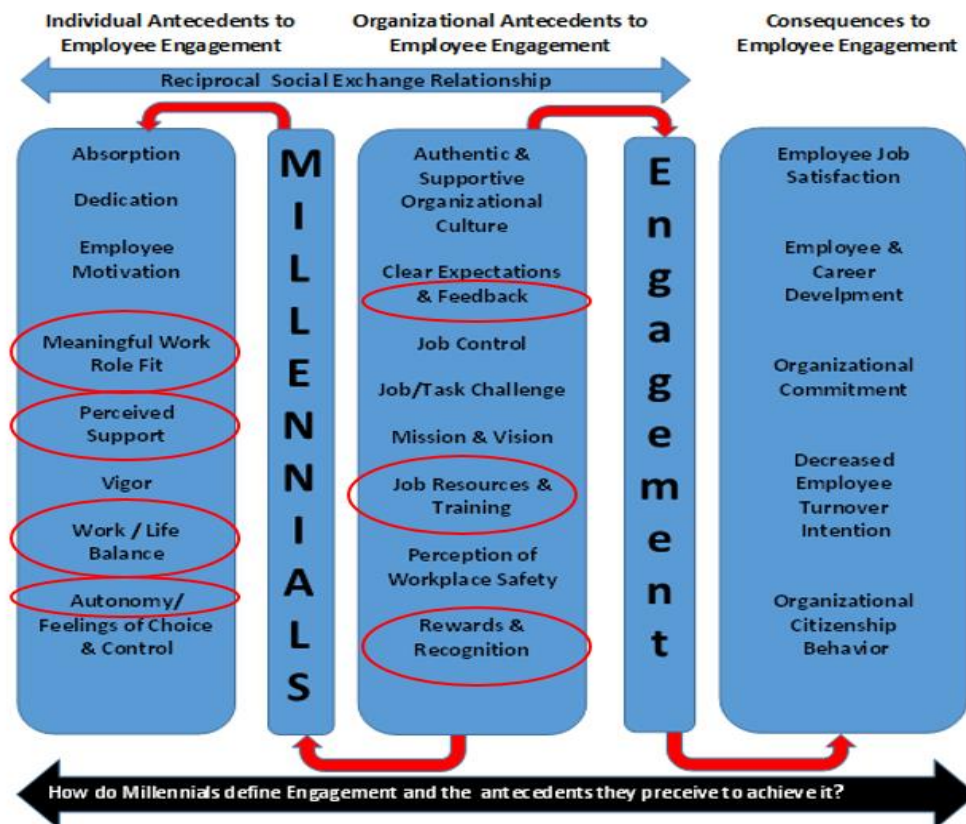
Figure 9. Individual/organizational EE antecedents and consequences.

This study has shown that individual antecedents are far more important to

millennials than organizational antecedents. The greatest influence on a millennial

accountant's level of EE is the individual antecedent of perceived support. Having the

support of a millennial's supervisor/management is critical to their long-term progress

and development. A millennial's success is dependent on the relationships he/she forms

with his/her management team. Millennials want to be challenged as they grow and develop. They want to take on projects to prove they are ready for the next step within an organization. It is the supervisor who can forge their path of success by giving them projects and allowing them the autonomy to showcase their skills and expertise.

WLB also proved to be of great importance to a millennial's engagement. Participants in this study proved to be consistent with research that showed that millennials work to live, not live to work (Deal & Levenson, 2016). Family is a priority and millennials are not willing to sacrifice time with their family for work. This is not to imply that millennials do not want to work hard; in fact, they are committed to their work and are willing to put in overtime to see a project through to completion. In return, millennials want the ability to take off for family priorities and not feel guilty about it. Most participants understand the cycles accountants face and have become accustomed to working through them, although there are some who feel disengaged over the notion that they are a constant interference with their family time. Millennials value their personal time and want control over it.

The organizational antecedents that proved most important include the ability to provide training opportunities, feedback, and recognition. Providing these organizational antecedents helps to validate a millennial's position within the organization and lead back to the individual antecedents of knowing they are a "fit" and are providing meaningful work to the organization. Millennials will take the steps necessary to ensure their own success; therefore, it is fathomable that they are most influenced by individual antecedents.

Impacts to Public Sector Leaders

EE can revolutionize an organization. It has the ability to unleash an employee's greatest potential while bringing dividends to an organization in the form of productivity, efficiency, and longevity. In order for an organization to capitalize on the benefits of EE, organizations should seek to make EE a priority. EE is a continuous process that should be an intentional part of an organization's standard operating procedures at all levels of an organization, especially for those who supervise and manage other employees. This section provides insights and opportunities for leaders to enhance EE within their organizations.

From this study, six specific insights have emerged for public sector leaders to undertake in an effort to improve the level of EE. The insights include the importance of (a) providing EE training to public sector supervisors/leaders; (b) acknowledge that accountants provide the organization with work that is meaningful, challenging, and also serves the greater good; (c) provide encouragement to employees along with timely feedback and recognition; (d) create an environment, which promotes growth, development, and future opportunities; (e) foster an environment that empowers employees and allows them to have a voice; and (f) promote WLB to allow employees to feel that their family priorities are just as important as their work priorities. These recommended insights are mostly behavioral changes that can be adopted as standard practices of an organization with minimal financial impact.

Insight 1

Provide EE training to public sector supervisor/leaders.

When leaders embrace the idea of EE and make it part of the mission of their organization, it can be transformative. Engaged employees will think and work proactively; they will be focused on the goals and successes of the organization; they will actively seek ways to expand their skills; they will persist when confronted with obstacles and challenges; and they will be more adaptable to change (Macey et al., 2009). These are qualities that, with training, supervisors and managers can bring out of their employees.

The first step to increasing EE is for leaders to assess the level of engagement within their organization. This study proved that employees want to have their voices heard. They are willing to share their thoughts and feelings when given the opportunity and with the understanding that there will be no impact or harm to them as a result of sharing their opinions. They are eager to share stories of how their supervisors have embraced and connected with them; however, they also will share when their supervisors have fallen short.

Employees want to be engaged. When an organization sets out on a journey to increase engagement, they typically start by sending surveys and conducting interviews. Organizations must make the commitment to acting on the solicited information they receive or else employees will become even more disengaged with the organization due to inaction. As Lavigna (2018) proved, when organizations took intentional actions to improve EE, they saw a definitive increase in the levels of engagement. However, when employees realized their organizations are not making any real strides in actively improving EE, they quickly begin feeling and acting disengaged.

To increase EE, leaders should start with anyone who manages employees. Leaders should make supervisors and managers understand the critical role they play in the lives of the employees they manage. The supervisors are the ones who interact on a daily basis with the employees, and that direct relationship will shape how the employees view the job that they do and how they view the organization as a whole (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). If an employee does not feel connected to his or her supervisors, she or he will most likely not feel connected to meeting the vision and goal of the organization. However, the ability of supervisors and managers to connect with and develop a trusting reciprocal relationship will increase EE and provide substantial benefits to the organization.

Leaders have to train supervisors and managers to practice those soft skills. Those are the skills associated with being a good listener, being friendly, prompt, being able to build effective teams, being sociable, and being empathic. These are the skills that matter to millennials as this is what they have been accustomed to with their parents. Millennials really want to be cared about at work in the same way as their parents cared about them at home. It is important to millennials that their supervisors show care and concern for their family. They want supervisors to ask how their kids are doing and how their weekend was. As much as millennials want to be successful in their careers, they have a deeper connection to their family, and they are not willing to sacrifice their family for their career. They are willing to work hard, go the extra mile, put in overtime when needed, but they want to feel cared about, appreciated for their actions, and rewarded for their sacrifices so that they can feel a sense of pride and accomplishment at work and at

home. Millennials interpret this behavior as their supervisors genuinely care for them, and millennials will reciprocate by being committed, loyal, and productive.

Leaders should model behaviors that demonstrate they are committed to EE. Millennials want to ensure that their organization supervisors' and leaders' behaviors align with their personal beliefs and actions. They want to see evidence of employees growing in the organization, being promoted, and providing a culture that is positive and enriching. Many of the participants mentioned the "tone at the top." MEE020 mentioned,

> I need to see my leadership and superiors lead by example. If I see them doing things that I don't see as being productive or not doing things in the best way or not fully investing themselves, that speaks volumes to the other employees and so I think witnessing or observing how your leadership or superiors carry themselves has a lot of bearing on how engaged the employees are. And to me, I mean, specifically, early in my career I had some superiors and leadership that were probably not the best mentors and I saw what that did to a workforce and I needed to get out of there, and that's when I decided to make some moves.

Management support proved to be the primary antecedent in influencing EE. It is incumbent upon leaders to create an environment where supervisors and managers can collaborate with millennials, allow them autonomy in the projects they are performing, and provide enough feedback to guide them in the right direction without feeling like they have to micromanage every step they take. Older generations may call this handholding; millennials view it as a well-deserved investment in their career and development.

Insight 2

Acknowledge that accountants provide the organization with work that is meaningful, challenging and also serves the greater good.

The millennial participants in this study are accountants who are proud of the specialized work they provide for their organizations. They understand that in many of their organizations, they play a supporting role. This role should not diminish the importance of the functions they perform. These participants are funding programs, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are effectively managed and prudently spent. They are the ones who provide the mandated financial reporting in order to continue to receive local, state, and federal funding.

The millennials in this study want to provide their technical expertise to serve the greater good of the organization. Leaders in organizations should acknowledge the work of their support staff. MEE001 expressed the following sentiments regarding his/her organization:

> They care about their social workers a lot more than they care about anybody else. Even though fiscal plays a huge role in every department, we have to understand that as accountants we are the silent heroes. We're in the back office crunching the numbers. We're figuring out how to find savings. We're figuring out what we can move around to be able to stay operational, but nobody knows that. They just see the social workers and the doctors, the firefighters and the sheriff deputies. They only see who is on the front line.

This very sentiment was echoed by a number of participants in the study. If leaders want to engage employees at all levels, they should make every employee, regardless of the

position he or she occupies, feel important and a critical part of achieving the mission and vision of the organization. Leaders should show that every contribution is needed and valued.

Insight 3

Provide encouragement, recognition and timely feedback.

In the public sector, there are very few bonus and performance incentive programs available. Thus, rewarding employees for the work they perform is typically nonmonetary and in the form of praise, recognition, and encouragement. The simple act of saying "thank you," "good job," or "I appreciate all that you do" to an employee provides the motivation he or she needs to continue producing for an organization. Those words are confirmation to an employee that he or she is valued and the organization is able to see the contributions he or she is making. According to Kouzes and Posner (2012), recognizing individuals uplifts their spirits and their internal drive to strive. It also stimulates their efforts to reach for higher levels of performance and to aspire to be true to the visions and values of the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Leaders should show employees they believe in them. MEE020 said,

Having your supervisor's support means they trust you and your decision making and the skill that you bring to the organization to carry out the task at hand. To have that buy-in from my supervisor means I am going to go above and beyond because they believe in me. So the fact that they believe in me, that makes me want to give all that I have to really show that they made the right decision in hiring me and to literally prove my worth.

Encouragement has been referred to as a renewable resource, which means that the more praise and encouragement that is given the more success that is created, then the more success that is created, the more there is to praise (Anchor, 2018).

In addition to encouragement and recognition, millennials desire immediate feedback (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). They want to be the best and they do not want to wait months to find out about their performance (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). If supervisors only provide feedback once a year, millennials are likely to disengage and leave the organization. They are not seeking to have in-depth feedback or performance reviews on a regular basis, they are merely seeking regular and timely feedback after an assignment or project has been completed. This can involve a short 5- to 10-minute conversation to let them know if their performance met the expectations the supervisor set for them. When supervisors and managers provide feedback and recognition, it helps communication and the building of a trusting reciprocal relationship. Millennial participants have expressed that they do not want to disappoint their supervisors. The only way they can know they did not disappoint, is if they are told they did not, and in return, they will keep producing work that they are proud of and work that the organization can be proud of.

Insight 4

Create an environment, which promotes growth, development, and future opportunities.

Leaders should create an environment in which employees can be successful. This would entail providing training opportunities, promotional opportunities, and a structured succession plan. Millennials thrive in organizations where they are learning

new skills and have a supervisor or mentor to guide them. Ninety-one percent of millennials aspire to be leaders; thus, they want to see a path of success within an organization (Jenkins, 2017).

Leaders can enhance engagement by promoting a formal mentoring program. Mentorships are a proven way of cultivating careers through one-on-one interactions. These programs have been widely successful because millennials have viewed their parents as role models who have guided them throughout their life. In the workplace, mentors can provide this same type of support and guidance (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Employees can gain self-confidence and learn how to effectively speak up and be heard, how to accept constructive criticism, and how to improve interpersonal relationship skills (Management Mentors, 2018). For the organization, mentoring programs show that leaders are willing to invest long term in their employees, they value their employees and their growth, and they want to create a more positive and engaging work environment. When MEE003 responded to how his/her organization can engage him/her, his/her response was,

> They can offer mentorships and show an interest in the opportunity for advancement and personal development especially for millennials. We are starting to get into the workforce and there's a lot of experience and knowledge and wisdom that older people or people who have been in the workforce longer have. They should be sharing that with the new generation coming in.

Insight 5

Foster an environment that empowers employees and allows them to have a voice.

If leaders want to empower their employees, they have to express confidence in

their ability to perform the functions they have been assigned. Millennials take great

pride in the work that they do and they do not want to be told how to complete every step

of a project. They want to be empowered and have autonomy to make decisions and take

risks to prove they can master and complete a task. Millennials want feedback and

guidance when necessary but do not want to be micromanaged. Deci and Ryan (1987)

posited that if workers have autonomy, they will be more likely to exhibit positive

attitudes and be more engaged in their job duties.

Leaders can increase EE by seeking to partner with millennials, allowing them to

participate in organizational events, and asking for their input and opinions. MEE007

shared,

> We got a new department head and he wanted to revamp the mission, and vision,
>
> and values statement. He put out a survey to all of the staff, not just upper
>
> management but to all of the staff to find out, what values do you think that we
>
> should have. Things like that can influence and be meaningful to you, and that's
>
> really good because you're including everyone and you really feel like you're a
>
> part of the decision because you had a hand in it. Your opinions matter.

Millennials do not care that their ideas are always accepted, they care more that someone

is willing to hear what they have to say (Lancaster & Stillman, 2010).

It is incumbent upon organizations to provide ways to solicit employees' opinions

and innovative ideas. Organizations can set up a suggestion box or use social media

technologies to encourage employees to provide innovative ways to improve operations

(Lavigna, 2015). Public sector leaders can develop a forum to identify suggestions so

that employees feel their voice is being heard and vet which ones are viable. Again,

millennials care less about their ideas being accepted and more that they are being heard.

Insight 6

Promote WLB to allow employees to feel that their family priorities are just as important as their work priorities.

An overarching theme from this study is that participants want WLB. Millennials

want to work hard for the organization then go home and enjoy time with their family.

At the County of Riverside, most employees have a 9/80 schedule, which allows them to

have a 3-day weekend every other week. This benefit was very important to most

participants and was a factor in influencing their level of engagement.

Participants did discuss their concerns over accountants being unable to take off

during financial reporting closing periods. Leaders may be unable to change these

timeframes; however, they could ensure that employees are properly cross-trained in all

closing functions in order to provide additional support and resources if available.

Leaders can also promote breaks and, if available, allow employees to flex time once the

closing period is over. It sends the signal that management acknowledges that the

employee is spending time away from his or her family to perform critical organizational

functions. Leaders can also plan events where employees can bring their families.

Summer picnics or a bowling night, for example, is an inviting way in which employees

can integrate their family life with their work life (Jenkins, 2017).

When overtime is required, the most powerful show of support is having the

supervisor or manager right there with the employees. When the supervisor is there

beside the employee pitching in and modeling the way, employees form stronger bonds

and teams work better together thus leading to increased EE. When employees are engaged, it becomes visible to others and it can become infectious. Employees are happier, more satisfied in their duties, more committed to the organization, more willing to help others, and more productive. Every single member of an organization can benefit from EE.

Recommendations for Future Research

EE is a relatively new phenomenon that researchers are studying. It is rapidly gaining popularity in organizations all around the world. Findings from this study added important insights and knowledge to the existing body of literature related to defining EE from a millennial local government accountant's perspective and identifying antecedents that influence engagement. Continued study is suggested to validate these findings. Recommendations for future study include conducting a mixed methodology study of local government millennials comparing the level of engagement between those working in a large-sized organization, a medium-sized organization, and those working in a smaller-sized organization. Researchers can gather data to determine the level of engagement among participants and then conduct interviews to assess what antecedents are causing them to feel engaged or disengaged.

Another area for future research would be to determine if there are other areas within a public sector organization that are deemed to be a support function. Researchers can assess if those millennials feel engaged and if they perceive to receive the same level of support at the organizational level as those in a primary role. A qualitative phenomenological study could be used as it would allow participants to share their learned experiences from being in a supportive role.

This study was conducted at a local government level. Future research could be conducted at the state or federal level to validate results. Participants can be accountants or another specialized profession within the government. Future studies will offer opportunities to learn how to improve the experiences of employees in the workplace. As governments have restrictions on monetary performance incentives, learning how to provide an environment that seeks to actively engage their employees may be the key to attracting and retaining millennials.

Finally, a study could be conducted to determine the impact of a mentoring program for millennials and their level of EE. Future researchers may choose different professions within the same organization or the same profession within different organizations. Supervisor support is important to millennials so combining that support and a mentorship program may vastly increase the level of engagement along with the long-term commitment.

Summary

This study was a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of local government millennial accountants. Twenty participants sought to define EE, describe their lived experiences, and then describe which antecedents most influenced their level of EE. Just as researchers have been seeking to find a universal definition of EE, each participant in this study shared his or her own unique version of a definition. While a common definition continues to remain elusive, for this research project employee, engagement was defined as "the evolution of a rewarding exchange relationship between an employee and the organization where the

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employee's passion and commitment to fulfill the organization's mission and purpose are reciprocated with increased job satisfaction, motivation, rewards, and recognition."

Defining EE is difficult, yet describing common elements of EE proved to be easier. Participants described EE with words like support, relationship, greater good, passion, voice, active involvement, motivation, and belonging. Also common were the consequences of EE. Employee engagement consequences included having a reciprocal relationship, organizational commitment, efficiency, increased morale, growth, and development. It is clear that researchers may never reach a consensus; thus, future research efforts should focus on achieving and maintaining EE rather than defining it.

Millennial participants expressed the importance of EE in the workplace. Engaged employees reported being more fulfilled, working at their potential, and always striving to achieve success. Participant responses were consistent with the historical origins of EE for which Kahn (1990) said that engagement promotes one's physical, cognitive and emotional connections to work and others.

The physical connection is the active involvement and the ability to provide a voice and give opinions that many participants described. It is the ability to effectively work independently and in teams. The cognitive connection is the passion and commitment that millennials expressed in the performance of their duties. Participants described it as a mindset toward their work and reported losing track of time when performing their job duties. The emotional connection is the relationships that millennials seek to develop with their supervisors. Millennials want their supervisors to have care and concern for them and their families. It is also the compassion that millennials feel toward their job and serving the greater good. Millennials take great

pride in providing indirect services to the citizens they serve. This study proved that the lived experiences of millennial accountants embody Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement.

This research project validates the notion that employee engagement is positively linked to the social exchange theory (SET). Through the lived experiences of the millennial accounting participants, they recounted stories of how they instinctively chose to reciprocate with working harder, being more productive, taking on more duties and assignments all because they perceived to receive a benefit from their organizations. This benefit was the support from a supervisor, the training they may have received, the opportunity to choose which assignment they wanted to work on or even just a simple thank you for the good job they were doing. The combination of EE and SET has even greater benefits as it creates relationships based on trust and gratitude. The building of these relationships in an organization creates a solid foundation that allows the success, growth and development of the individual and the organization to flourish and in the end, the citizen they serve ultimately reap the greater reward and benefits of more efficient and effective services.

This study also proved that while organizational antecedents are influential to EE, local public sector millennial accountants are most influenced by individual antecedents such as supervisor support, WLB, meaningful work, and autonomy. The work that accountants perform is highly specialized and unique to each organization. The accounting series at the County of Riverside has a definitive career path; thus, millennials are most engaged by individual antecedents where they can partner with supervisors to ensure progressive movement along the series. Further, this research confirmed that

when employees perceive to receive a benefit, they will reciprocate. Participants, who felt supported, received training and promotional opportunities, and in return were more productive, dedicated, and committed to the organization.

Millennials have a great deal of respect for those who have paved the way for them. They want to learn from older generational cohorts. They want to be groomed and coached by them and learn all they can from them. However, they want to take a project and add their personal touch. While older generations do not want to recreate the wheel, millennials want to redesign it with the newest technology, making it faster and more efficient.

The essence of the public sector experience was one that was gratifying in that a majority of participants took great pride in knowing that the work they were performing was contributing to the greater good of the organization. Many have never interacted with the citizens they serve; however, their skills and expertise funded programs and allowed citizens to receive the services they want and need. Participants proved they really are the heroes of local government.

Future studies include replicating this study within the federal or state government and determining if the size of an organization has any impact on engagement. Research can be conducted to determine if employees in a support position experience the same level of engagement as those in a position that directly supports the organization's mission and goals. Exploring the lived experience of millennial employees is vital in learning how to promote EE in order to attract and retain talent within the organization.

EE is critical to an organization's success. There are simple acts that can make the difference between an employee being engaged or being disengaged. The key is that

EE should be consistent and intentional. EE should start at the highest levels of the organization and trickle down to every level. EE, as millennial participants noted, is contagious and will spread throughout the organization. Public sector leaders and supervisors can engage their workforce and not spend a penny of their organization's funds. It is by their direct actions that they have the power to make a difference in the lives of their employees and increase the level of productivity and employee retention within their organizations. It is as simple as saying good morning, how are you doing, good job, keep it up and most importantly thank you for all you do. If supervisors did this consistently, they would have the power to increase the level of engagement of their entire workforce, and that should be the ultimate goal of every public sector leader.

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APPENDICES

Public Information Request

From: Tanya S Harris [mailto:TanyaS.Harris@calbaptist.edu]
Sent: Thursday, March 29, 2018 5:40 PM
To: Human Resources <HRDEPT@RIVCO.ORG>
Subject: Public Information Request
Importance: High

TANYA S. HARRIS, CPA, MPA

Michael Bowers, Interim HR Director
Riverside County Human Resources Department
Attn: Public Information Request
4080 Lemon Street, 11th Floor
Riverside, CA 92502-1326

Dear Mr. Bowers and Official Records Custodian:

Pursuant to the California Constitution, Article I, Section 3, subdivision (b), and the California Public Records Act, California Government Code Section 6250, et seq., I respectfully request to receive public records by email. I am requesting to obtain a list of the names of permanent employees who were born between 1981 and 2000 and are currently in any of the accounting series positions listed below:

Job Code	HR Job Title	Job Code	HR Job Title
15911	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT I	77418	SYSTEMS ACCOUNTANT I
15912	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT II	77419	SYSTEMS ACCOUNTANT II
15913	SR ACCOUNTING ASST	77421	SR INTERNAL AUDITOR
15915	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I	77422	ACCOUNTANT II - PARKS
15916	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN II	77425	ASST COUNTY AUDITOR-CONTROLLER
15917	SUPV ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN	77426	DEP AUDITOR-CONTROLLER
15919	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I - CN	77428	RCA SUPERVISING ACCOUNTANT
15927	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN II - C	77434	DEP TREASURER/TAX COLLECTOR
15933	ACCOUNTING ASST I - CN	77435	ASST TREASURER/TAX COLLECTOR
15937	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN II - CN	77438	CHF DEP TREASURER-TAX COLL
74112	ASSOC MANAGEMENT ANALYST	77438	SR CHF DEP TREASURER-TAX COLL
74120	MANAGEMENT ANALYST	77441	AUDITOR/APPRAISER I
74134	PRINCIPAL MGMT ANALYST	77442	AUDITOR/APPRAISER II
74150	SR MANAGEMENT ANALYST	77443	SR AUDITOR/APPRAISER
74211	HOSPITAL BUDGET REIMBURSE OFCR	77444	SUPV AUDITOR-APPRAISER
74532	TREASURER & TAX COLLECTOR	77490	CHF FINANCE OFFICER, DPSS
74608	INTERNAL AUDIT & COMP MGR	77497	FISCAL ANALYST
75212	COUNTY AUDITOR-CONTROLLER	77499	FISCAL MANAGER
77409	BUDGET/REIMBURSEMENT ANALYST	77500	FISCAL ANALYST - TTC
77410	ACCOUNTANT TRAINEE	77620	EO PRINCIPAL BUDGET ANALYST
77411	ACCOUNTANT I	80070	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT II - WRMD
77412	ACCOUNTANT II	80071	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I - WRMD
77413	SR ACCOUNTANT	85001	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT II-PARKS
77414	PRINCIPAL ACCOUNTANT	85002	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I -PARKS
77415	CHF ACCOUNTANT	85080	SUPV ACCOUNTANT - PARKS
77416	SUPV ACCOUNTANT	85081	FISCAL MANAGER - PARKS
		92740	D.A. FORENSIC ACCOUNTANT

Pursuant to § 6253, subd. (c), please inform me whether or not you are in possession of names and positions requested. If you determine that some but not all of the information is exempt from disclosure and that you intend to withhold it, I ask that you redact it for the time being and make the rest available as requested. If you deny any part of my request, please provide a signed notification citing the legal authorities on which you rely if you determine that any or all of the information is exempt and will not be disclosed. Please also provide the name and title of each person responsible for the denial if a statutory exemption applies or if disclosure of all or part of the requested records is otherwise not required. See 37 Gov. Code, § 6255, subd. (b). 37 Gov. Code, § 6253 subd.(d).

Disclosable public information in a data base is subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act (Cal. Gov't Code § 6250 et seq.) pursuant to Sierra Club v. Superior Court, 57 Cal.4th 157 (2013) and California Government Code Section 6253.9. - *This applies as the information requested is easily accessible through a query out of HRMS.*

 Section 6253.9 reflects that the government has to produce identifiable public records in electronic form, when the disclosure is not authorize exempt, in either an electronic format actually used by the government agency or paper format as requested.

Thank you for your assistance in fulfilling this request.

Sincerely,

Tanya S. Harris

Tanya S. Harris

Disclosures

TANYA S. HARRIS, CPA, MPA

California Government Code Section 6253.9.

Information in an electronic format; costs; application; availability

(a) Unless otherwise prohibited by law, any agency that has information that constitutes an identifiable public record not exempt from disclosure pursuant to this chapter that is in an electronic format shall make that information available in an electronic format when requested by any person and, when applicable, shall comply with the following:

(1) The agency shall make the information available in any electronic format in which it holds the information.

(2) Each agency shall provide a copy of an electronic record in the format requested if the requested format is one that has been used by the agency to create copies for its own use or for provision to other agencies. The cost of duplication shall be limited to the direct cost of producing a copy of a record in an electronic format.

(b) Notwithstanding paragraph (2) of subdivision (a), the requester shall bear the cost of producing a copy of the record, including the cost to construct a record, and the cost of programming and computer services necessary to produce a copy of the record when either of the following applies:

(1) In order to comply with the provisions of subdivision (a), the public agency would be required to produce a copy of an electronic record and the record is one that is produced only at otherwise regularly scheduled intervals.

(2) The request would require data compilation, extraction, or programming to produce the record.

(c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require the public agency to reconstruct a record in an electronic format if the agency no longer has the record available in an electronic format.

(d) If the request is for information in other than electronic format, and the information also is in electronic format, the agency may inform the requester that the information is available in electronic format.

(e) Nothing in this section shall be construed to permit an agency to make information available only in an electronic format.

(f) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require the public agency to release an electronic record in the electronic form in which it is held by the agency if its release

would jeopardize or compromise the security or integrity of the original record or of any proprietary software in which it is maintained.

(g) Nothing in this section shall be construed to permit public access to records held by any agency to which access is otherwise restricted by statute.

EXEMPTION FOR PERSONNEL, MEDICAL OR SIMILAR RECORDS

(Gov. Code, § 6254(c))

A. Records Covered

A personnel, medical or similar record generally refers to intimate or personal information which an individual is required to provide to a government agency frequently in connection with employment.[41] The fact that information is in a personnel file does not necessarily make it exempt information.[42] Information such as an individual's qualifications, training, or employment background, which are generally public in nature, ordinarily are not exempt[43]

B. Disclosure Would Constitute An Unwarranted Invasion Of Privacy

If information is intimate or personal in nature and has not been provided to a government agency as part of an attempt to acquire a benefit, disclosure of the information probably would constitute a violation of the individual's privacy. However, the invasion of an individual's privacy must be balanced against the public's need for the information. Only where the invasion of privacy is unwarranted as compared to the public interest in the information does the exemption permit the agency to withhold the record from disclosure. If this balancing test indicates that the privacy interest outweighs the public interest in disclosure, disclosure of the record by the government would appear to constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Birthdates have already been given to HR as part of an employee's disclosure of information thus it would not constitute a violation of an individual's privacy to provide ONLY the name of employees that were born between 1981 and 2000.

Tanya S. Harris, CPA, MPA

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From: Cacho, Clorissa <CCACHO@RIVCO.ORG>
Sent: Wednesday, April 4, 2018 4:34 PM
To: Tanya S Harris
Cc: Escobedo, Kendra; Franco, Sarah
Subject: FW: Public Information Request

Good Afternoon,

The Human Resources Department is in receipt of your CPRA request dated March 29, 2018. Attached is the list of employee names who were born between 1981 and 2000 and are currently in any accounting classifications identified (as of 04/02/2018). Accordingly, the County deems your CPRA request satisfied.

Should you have any questions or concerns please let me know.

Thank you,

Clorissa Cacho, PHR
Principal Human Resources Analyst - Employee & Labor Relations Division
County of Riverside Human Resources

951.955.3885 direct

951.955.9816 fax

ccacho@rivco.org

Recruitment E-mail/Flyer

Participants are needed in a Research Study:

Employee Engagement: The Path to Understanding Public Sector Millennials

I am a doctoral student at California Baptist University and conducting a study of Millennial Employee Engagement.

I am seeking County of Riverside employees who are:

- *Full-Time Permanent Employees*
- *Who are over the age of 18 and born between 1981 and 2000*
- *Who are in any of the positions listed below*

Job Code	HR Job Title	Job Code	HR Job Title
15911	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT I	77418	SYSTEMS ACCOUNTANT I
15912	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT II	77419	SYSTEMS ACCOUNTANT II
15913	SR ACCOUNTING ASST	77421	SR INTERNAL AUDITOR
15915	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I	77422	ACCOUNTANT II - PARKS
15916	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN II	77425	ASST COUNTY AUDITOR-CONTROLLER
15917	SUPV ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN	77426	DEP AUDITOR-CONTROLLER
15919	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I - CN	77428	RCA SUPERVISING ACCOUNTANT
15927	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN II - C	77434	DEP TREASURER/TAX COLLECTOR
15933	ACCOUNTING ASST I - CN	77435	ASST TREASURER/TAX COLLECTOR
15937	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN II - CN	77438	CHF DEP TREASURER-TAX COLL
74112	ASSOC MANAGEMENT ANALYST	77438	SR CHF DEP TREASURER-TAX COLL
74120	MANAGEMENT ANALYST	77441	AUDITOR/APPRAISER I
74134	PRINCIPAL MGMT ANALYST	77442	AUDITOR/APPRAISER II
74150	SR MANAGEMENT ANALYST	77443	SR AUDITOR/APPRAISER
74211	HOSPITAL BUDGET REIMBURSE OFCR	77444	SUPV AUDITOR-APPRAISER
74532	TREASURER & TAX COLLECTOR	77490	CHF FINANCE OFFICER, DPSS
74608	INTERNAL AUDIT & COMP MGR	77497	FISCAL ANALYST
75212	COUNTY AUDITOR-CONTROLLER	77499	FISCAL MANAGER
77409	BUDGET/REIMBURSEMENT ANALYST	77500	FISCAL ANALYST - TTC
77410	ACCOUNTANT TRAINEE	77620	EO PRINCIPAL BUDGET ANALYST
77411	ACCOUNTANT I	80070	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT II - WRMD
77412	ACCOUNTANT II	80071	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I - WRMD
77413	SR ACCOUNTANT	85001	ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT II-PARKS
77414	PRINCIPAL ACCOUNTANT	85002	ACCOUNTING TECHNICIAN I -PARKS
77415	CHF ACCOUNTANT	85080	SUPV ACCOUNTANT - PARKS
77416	SUPV ACCOUNTANT	85081	FISCAL MANAGER - PARKS
		92740	D.A. FORENSIC ACCOUNTANT

What: My dissertation research involves discovering the lived experiences of Millennial's in an accounting series position.

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to understand from your perspective what are the factors that cause you to feel engaged in the performance of your job duties.

How: During the month of April 2018, Participants will be involved in an online interview using GoToMeeting with the investigator.

All participants will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card as a token of my appreciation for your time and contribution to my research study.
Please see attachments for more information:
Should you have any questions or concern, please feel free to contact me

Thanks in advance for your consideration and I hope to hear from you soon.

APPENDIXC

Initial Letter of Introduction

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Tanya S. Harris, and I am a doctoral candidate at California Baptist University, Online and Professional Studies. I am working on a doctorate in public administration. I am conducting a research study entitled: Employee Engagement: The Path to Understanding Public Sector Millennials.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of employee engagement from a public sector's millennials perspective. I am soliciting your participation in a 90-minute interview that will involve answering 17 questions about employee engagement.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. The results of this research study may be published but your name, your organization's name or any other identifiable information will never be disclosed to any outside party.

There are no foreseeable risks to you from participating in this research. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, your involvement may contribute knowledge of millennial employee engagement. As a token of appreciation for your time, you will receive a $10 gift card to Starbucks.

If you choose to participate, please digitally sign and email back the attached Informed Consent Agreement. All interviews will be performed using GoToMeeting at a mutually agreeable date and time. You will be sent an invitation with a link and access code to join the GoToMeeting.

GoToMeeting allows users to instantly join (no download required) from any desktop or mobile device by selecting the provided link. Participants can use the free mobile app to start the scheduled meeting from any iPhone, iPad, Android device or Windows mobile device. You will also have the ability to dial in from any landline phone and connect to the GoToMeeting using the access code in the invitation.

I sincerely hope that you will participate and look forward to hearing your experiences! If you have any questions on the research study, please feel free to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

Tanya S. Harris

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: Employee Engagement: The Path to Understanding Public Sector

Millennials

Researcher: Tanya S. Harris

Dear Prospective Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Tanya S. Harris at California Baptist University Online and Professional Studies, Doctorate of Public Administration program. I hope to learn how public sector millennials view employee engagement. For the purpose of this study, Millennials are defined as those employees greater than 18 years old and were born between the years of 1981 and 2000. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because I want to focus solely on studying millennials working in local government accounting related positions.

What are the next steps once you choose to participate in this study

- ✓ Your participation will involve an online interview using GoToMeeting in which you will give your honest response to 17 interview questions regarding employee engagement.
    - o GoToMeetings can be conducted from any desktop/laptop, iPhone, iPad, Android device, Windows Mobile device or landline phone.
- ✓ Your participation will take 90 minutes or less.
- ✓ Your participation is strictly voluntary.
    - o It is your choice to participate in this research or choose not to.
    - o If you choose to participate, you may change your mind and leave the study at any time.
    - o You may skip any questions you do not want to answer.
    - o Refusal to participate or leaving during the interview process will not cause any negative consequences.
- ✓ Strict procedures are in place to protect your privacy and confidentiality
- ✓ Your responses to the questions will never be linked or identified to you or your organization.
    - o In the research document, responses will refer to an alphanumeric coding system.
- ✓ All interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy purposes only.

- o Your recorded interview will be downloaded and saved using a password protected file. The file name will refer only to the assigned alphanumeric code and the date of the interview.
- o The researcher is the only one who will have access to the cross reference between the alphanumeric codes and participant names. This information will never be made public.
- o The researcher will destroy all electronic and paper documents five years after publishing the study by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files.
- ✓ You will not be paid for participating in this research study. You will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card as a token of appreciation for your time. It will be emailed to you at the conclusion of the interview.

We cannot promise any benefits to you for taking part in this research. However, we believe this research will contribute to the understanding of employee engagement from a Millennials perspective.

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences as a result of participating in this research study. Although I do not anticipate any risks, if you experience discomfort, you may contact me (the researcher), or the CBU Counseling Center (951-689-1120, https://www.calbaptist.edu/counseling-center/).

The researcher is Tanya Harris. The Chair overseeing this research is Dr. Elaine Ahumada. Please feel free to contact one or both of them if you have questions, concerns, complaints, feel harmed, or would like to talk to any member of the research team.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at California Baptist University (IRB # 069-1718-EXP). They can be reached at by emailing irb@calbaptist.edu if your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team, if you cannot reach the research team, if you want to talk to someone besides the research team, or if you have questions about your rights as a research participant.

What are the next steps once you choose to participate in this study:

The researcher will need a signed **Statement of Consent** which confirms that the researcher has explained the purpose of this research and the intended outcome.

- ✓ The Participant understands that upon receiving the signed Statement of Consent, the researcher will contact me by email to establish a mutually agreeable date and time to participate in an online interview using GoToMeeting.
- ✓ The Participant understands that the researcher will ask questions about experiences as a millennial in a public sector accounting related position.
- ✓ The Participant acknowledges that **ALL INTERVIEWS WILL BE AUDIO RECORDED** and that all audio recordings will be used for research purposes and will not be used outside the research project.

- ✓ The Participants participation in this study should take about 90 minutes or less.
- ✓ The Participant understands that their responses will be confidential and that anonymity will be preserved by using a alphanumeric code in all writings that pertain to the research findings.
- ✓ The Participant acknowledges that they may their name and their organization's name will not be associated with any results of this study.
- ✓ The Participant may contact the researchers or irb@calbaptist.edu for additional questions.

By digitally signing this form you acknowledge that you have read the informed consent, you understand the nature of the study, your interview will be audio taped and the potential risks to you as a participant, and the means by which your identity will be kept confidential. Your signature on this form also indicates that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission voluntarily to serve as a participant in the study described.

✕ _____

                                    Please digitally sign here if you <u>consent </u>to participate in the study

Please email me this form back to me if you agree to participate. I will then contact you by email to set up a mutually agreeable date and time to conduct the interview. Thanks for your consideration,

Tanya S. Harris

APPENDIX E

Confidentiality Statement

As a researcher working on a study titled: Employee Engagement: The Path to Understanding Public Sector Millennials at California Baptist University, I understand that I must maintain the confidentiality of all information concerning research participants as required by law. Only the California Baptist University Institutional Review Board may have access to this information. "Confidential Information" of participants includes but is not limited to: names, characteristics, or other identifying information accrued either directly or indirectly through contact with any participant, and/or any other information that by its nature would be considered confidential.

To maintain the confidentiality of information, I hereby agree to refrain from discussing or disclosing any Confidential Information regarding research participants, to any individual who is not part of the above research study or in need of the information for the expressed purposes on the research program. This includes having a conversation regarding the research project or its participants in a place where such a discussion might be overheard; or discussing any Confidential Information in a way that would allow an unauthorized person to associate (either correctly or incorrectly) an identity with such information. I further agree to store research records whether paper, electronic or otherwise in a secure locked location under my direct control and with appropriate safe guards. I agree that I will immediately report any known or suspected breach of this confidentiality statement regarding the above research project to the California Baptist University Institutional Review Board.

_____ _____ _____

Signature of Researcher   Printed Name   Date

_____ _____ _____

Signature of Witness   Printed Name   Date

Research Participants Bill of Rights

Your Right as a Research Participant

If you are asked to consent to be a subject in a research study, you have the following rights:

1. To have enough time to decide whether or not to be in the research study, and to make that decision without any pressure from the people who are conducting the research.
2. To refuse to be in the study at all, or to stop participating at any time after you begin the study.
3. To be told what the study is trying to find out, what will happen to you, and what you will be asked to do if you are in the study.
4. To ask any questions concerning the research purposes and procedures.
5. Be given a copy of any signed and dated written consent form related to the research.
6. To be told about the reasonably foreseeable risks of being in the study.
7. To be told about the possible benefits of being in the study.
8. To be told whether there are any costs associated with being in the study and whether you will be compensated for participating in the study.
9. To be told who will have access to information collected about you and how your confidentiality will be protected.
10. To be told whom to contact with questions about the research, about research-related injuries, and about your rights as a research subject.

Your Responsibilities as a Research Participant

1. Completely read the consent form and ask the Principal Investigator (PI) any questions you may have. You should understand what will happen to you during the study before you agree to participate.
2. Know the dates when your study participation starts and ends.
3. Carefully weigh the possible benefits (if any) and risks of being in the study.
4. Talk to the PI if you want to stop being part of the research study.
5. Contact the PI and/or the California Baptist University Institutional Review Board (IRB) with complaints or concerns about your participation in the study.
6. Report to the PI immediately any and all problems you may be having with the study procedures.
7. Fulfill the responsibilities of participation as described on the consent forms unless you are stopping your participation in the study.
8. Ask for the results of the study, if you want them.
9. Keep a copy of the consent form for your records.

The Principal Investigator's Responsibilities

The PI is the individual who is responsible for a research study. The PI is required to:

1. Follow the California Baptist University IRB-approved research study plan.
2. Obtain informed consent from all study participants.
3. Maintain the confidentiality of study participants.
4. Quickly respond to all participant concerns and questions.
5. Tell participants about changes to the risks or benefits of the study.
6. Get approval from the California Baptist University IRB for any changes to the study.
7. Promptly report all unanticipated problems or research-related injuries to the IRB.
8. Keep research records for five (5) years after the study is over.
9. Comply with all California Baptist University procedures for the ethical conduct of human subject research.

APPENDIX G

Research Agreement

To: Institutional Review Board, California Baptist University

From: Frankie Ezzat, Riverside County Assistant Auditor-Controller

Date: March 1, 2018

Subject: Consent to recruit from organization

I, Frankie Ezzat, Riverside County Assistant Auditor-Controller, have discussed the research project, "Employee Engagement: The Path to Understanding Public Sector Millennials" with Tanya S. Harris. I understand that Ms. Harris is conducting this study as part of her doctoral dissertation in Public Administration at California Baptist University. I am delighted to support her in this valuable endeavor.

I understand that Ms. Harris will be recruiting accounting participants from the County of Riverside. Ms. Harris will utilize a public information request to identify names and positions of employees who are in an accounting series position and born between 1981 and 2000. I understand that individuals may be contacted to solicit their participation in this research project. I am also aware and understand the benefits, risks, and time involved in participating in this study. I understand that individual participation is contingent upon voluntary and informed consent. Ms. Harris will be prohibited from soliciting participants from the Auditor-Controller's Office to eliminate any concerns of coercion or undue influence.

Ms. Harris has assured me that no participant names and/or organizations will ever be made public and all identities will remain confidential. I am aware of the process that Ms. Harris will go through to recruit participants and conduct interviews in the manner approved by CBU's IRB (as described in the protocol).

I hereby give Tanya Harris, permission to use the names obtained from the public information request to recruit potential participants for her research project. It is a pleasure to be of assistance in supporting this research project.

Please contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Frankie Ezzat _____ Date: 3/1/2018

Riverside County Assistant Auditor-Controller

APPENDIX H

Instrumentation

In a qualitative research project there are no specific predetermined instruments. Instead, the researcher becomes the key instrument in the collection of data. To gain an understanding of the lived experiences of public sector millennial accountants, this research project will utilize a semi-structured interview process with 17 open-ended questions. The interview questions are intended to be non-threatening. The semi-structured format will enable the PI to ask follow-up questions and probes to clarify a response or provide further understanding to the participant. An open-ended question cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no" thus, it enables participants to provide meaningful, well thought out responses to the questions asked. According to Irving Seidman, interviews are at the root of understanding the lived-experience of other people and a way to offer meaning to their experiences. Through this interview process, Millennials participants will be able to vocalize and tell their experience from their own point of view. The following interview questions will be used.

Interview Questions
1. How do you define employee engagement?
2. What is your experience being engaged? Please explain.
3. What factors do you perceive to influence your personal level of engagement? And Why?
4. What can your organization do to influence your level of engagement? And Why?
5. What does having meaningful work mean to you?
6. What does having work/life balance mean to you?
7. What does being a "fit" in the role that you perform mean to you?
8. What does having your supervisor's support mean to you?
9. What does having your organization's support mean to you?
10. What does having choice and control over the tasks you perform mean to you?
11. What does receiving encouragement at work mean to you?
12. What does receiving timely feedback mean to you?
13. What does having opportunities for learning in your organization mean to you?
14. Describe if having a partnership of give and take with your organization contributes to your level of employee engagement? And Why?
15. Describe what the impact of being fully engaged would have on your organization?
16. Are there any other factors that would have an influence on your level of employee engagement?
17. Finally, is there anything else about employee engagement that you would like to add?

Interview Protocol & Script

STUDY TITLE:

Employee Engagement: The Path to Understanding Public Sector Millennials

TIME OF INTERVIEW: _____ DATE: _____

GENDER: _____ CURRENT AGE :_____

YEARS/MONTHS AT THE COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE: _____

CURRENT POSITION: _____ HOW LONG IN CURRENT ROLE: _____

The following provides an outline to guide the interview process for each participant to maintain consistency.

I. Introduction

Welcome and overview of session:

Hello and Thank you for your participation in my research study on employee engagement. My name is Tanya S. Harris. I am a doctoral candidate at the California Baptist University, Online and Professional Studies. I am working on a doctorate of public administration. You have read, acknowledged, and signed the Inform Consent letter that explains the intent and characteristics of the study, as well as the authorization form to audiotape this interview. I will ask you 17 questions regarding employee engagement from a millennial's perspective. Today's discussion will be conducted within a 90 minutes timeframe. When we get close to the end time of the appointment, I will let you know. We will not go beyond that time unless you agree to do so.

Background:

There are over 100 million full-time employees in the American workforce, and the culture of organizations are experiencing significant changes. Baby boomers are retiring at record numbers, and millennial workers are overtaking the number of Baby Boomers and Generation X employees in the workforce. In 2015, Millennials made up 35 percent of the workforce however by 2025, 75% of workers will be a Millennial. It is imperative that leaders understand how to engage the millennial cohort.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore a public sector millennial accountants experience with employee engagement and the factors that lead to increased engagement. Millennial's in this study will be defined as employees who are over the age of 18 and born between 1981 and 2000.

Ground Rules:

Please be aware, your participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without fear of penalty or loss of benefit to you. All responses will be kept confidential. For your participation, you will receive a $10 gift card to Starbucks which will be emailed to you at the conclusion of the interview. Feel free to disclose as much about your experiences as you feel comfortable. Any reference to your responses contributing to the study will be coded and any identifiable information will be removed.

If there are any questions that you cannot answer or do not feel comfortable answering, we can skip over those questions. In addition, I may be taking notes during our conversation and audio recording it for a transcript. There are no foreseeable risks to you from participating in this study.

There are no incorrect responses; say whatever comes to mind. I will retain all notes and audio tapes and no names will appear on the final report. Again, our discussion will focus on a millennials experience with employee engagement.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

II. Interview Questions

1. How do you define employee engagement?

2. What is your experience being engaged? Please explain.

3. What factors do you perceive to influence your personal level of engagement?

4. What can your organization do to influence your level of engagement?

5. What does having meaningful work mean to you?

6. What does having work/life balance mean to you?

7. What does being a "fit" in the role that you perform mean to you?

8. What does having your supervisor's support mean to you?

9. What does having your organization's support mean to you?

10. What does having choice and control over the tasks you perform mean to you?

11. What does receiving encouragement at work mean to you?

12. What does receiving timely feedback mean to you?

13. What does having opportunities for learning in your organization mean to you?

14. Describe if having a partnership of give and take with your organization contributes to your level of employee engagement?

15. Describe what the impact of being fully engaged would have on your organization?

16. Are there any other factors that would have an influence on your level of employee engagement?

17. Finally, is there anything else about employee engagement that you would like to add?

III. Debriefing

Thank you for your participation. The information and responses you shared with me today will remain confidential. I will not use your name, your organization name or any other identifying information in the dissertation. I will be emailing your Starbucks gift card to your email account.

IRB Approval Letter

From: Institutional Review Board
Sent: Thursday, March 29, 2018 1:18 PM
To: Tanya S Harris
Cc: Elaine Ahumada; Institutional Review Board
Subject: IRB 069-1718-EXP Approval

RE: IRB Review

IRB No.: 069-1718-EXP

Project: Employee Engagement: The Path to Understanding Public Sector Millennials

Date Complete Application Received: 3/6/18

Principle Investigator: Tanya S. Harris

Faculty Advisor: Elaine Ahumada

College/Department: OPS

IRB Determination: Exempt Application Approved – Student research using confidential audio-recorded interviews collected via online platform; no minor participants; no more than minimal risk/risk appropriately mitigated; no deception utilized; acceptable consent procedures and documentation; acceptable data protection procedures. Data collection may begin, in accordance with the final submitted documents and approved protocol.

Future Correspondence: All future correspondence about this project must include all PIs, Co-PIs, and Faculty Advisors (as relevant) and reference the assigned IRB number.

Approval Information: In the case of an unforeseen risk/adverse experience, please report this to the IRB immediately using the appropriate forms. Requests for a change to protocol must be submitted for IRB review and approved prior to implementation. At the completion of the project, you are to submit a Research Closure Form.

Researcher Responsibilities: The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted in the manner outlined in the IRB application and that all reporting requirements are met. Please refer to this approval and to the IRB handbook for more information.

Date: March 29, 2018